PRODUCED BY FANS.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

In leather-neck language

"LISTERINE HAS LANDED

and the situation is well in hand!"

Tested treatment attacks infection. 76% of test cases noted marked improvement in symptoms. Easy, quick, delightful. No mess, no grease.

ITCHY SCALP and inflammation, tell-tale flakes and scales are plenty of trouble for anybody, even for a husky Marine who takes trouble as it comes!

These are symptoms that shouldn't be neglected, for dandruff is often infectious. And these symptoms may mean that *you* have the infectious type of dandruff . . . that millions of germs are at work on your scalp.

Now, the sensible way to fight an infectious condition is with antiseptic action which attacks large numbers of the germs that accompany the infection *and quickly kills them.*

When Listerine Antiseptic is massaged onto your scalp, it's the finish of literally millions of germs associated with infectious dandruff! Even the strange and stubborn "bottle bacillus" is killed in vast numbers! This is the same "bottle bacillus"—Pityrosporum ovale—that many leading authorities brand as a causative agent of infectious dandruff.

Listerine gives scalp and hair a cool, invigorating antiseptic bath. Ugly, loosened dandruff scales begin to disappear. Itching and irritation are relieved. Your scalp feels better, your hair looks cleaner.

Scientific tests showed amazing results. In one series of clinical tests, under exacting conditions, 76% of the dandruff sufferers who used Listerine Antiseptic and massage twice a day showed complete disappearance of, or marked improvement in, the symptoms within a month.

In addition to this, men and women all over America have written enthusiastic letters, telling how delighted they are with the results of the Listerine Antiseptic home treatment.

If you have this troublesome scalp condition, don't delay treatment. Neglect may aggravate the symptoms. Start *today* with Listerine Antiseptic and massage. Give Listerine a chance to do for you what it has done for so many others.

LAMBERT PHARMACAL COMPANY, *St. Louis, Mo.*

THE TREATMENT

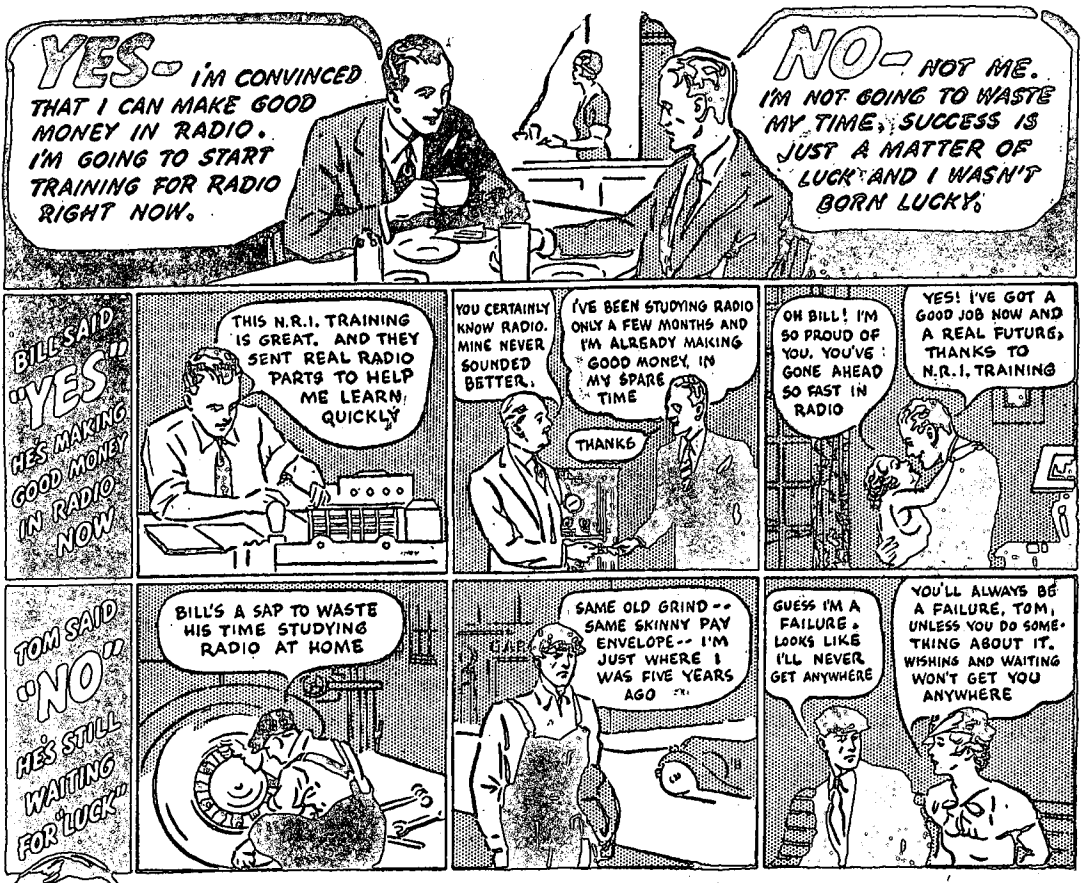
MEN: Douse full strength Listerine on the scalp morning and night.

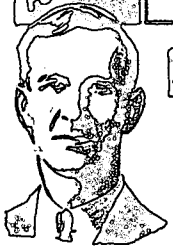
WOMEN: Part the hair at various places, and apply Listerine Antiseptic.

Always follow with vigorous and persistent massage. Listerine is the same antiseptic that has been famous for more than 50 years as a gargle.

Listerine for INFECTIOUS DANDRUFF *the tested treatment*

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED





I will Train You at Home in Spare Time for a GOOD JOB IN RADIO

J. E. SMITH, President
National Radio Institute
Established 25 Years

Here is a quick way to more pay. Radio offers the chance to make $5, $10 a week extra in spare time a few months from now. There is an increasing demand for full time Radio Technicians and Radio Operators, too. Many make $30, $40, $50 a week. On top of record business, the Radio industry is getting millions and millions of dollars in Defense Orders. Clip the coupon below and mail it. Find out how I train you for these opportunities.

Why Many Radio Technicians I Train Make $30, $40, $50 a Week

Over 800 broadcasting stations in the U. S. employ thousands of Radio Technicians, with average pay among the country's best paid industries. Repairing, servicing, selling home and auto Radio receivers (there are over 50,000,000 in use) gives good jobs to thousands. Many other Radio Technicians take advantage of the opportunities to have their own service or retail Radio businesses. Think of the many good pay jobs in connection with Aviation, Commercial, Police Radio and Public Address Systems. N.R.I. gives you the required knowledge of Radio for those jobs. N.R.I. trains you to be ready when Television opens new jobs. Yes, Radio Technicians make good money because they use their heads as well as their hands. They must be trained. Many are getting special ratings in the Army and Navy; extra rank and pay.

Beginners Quickly Learn to Earn $5, $10 a Week Extra in Spare Time

Nearly every neighborhood offers opportunities for a good part-time Radio Technician to make extra money fixing Radio sets. I give you special training to show you how to start cashing in on these opportunities early. You get Radio parts and instructions for building test equipment, for conducting experiments that give you valuable practical experience. You also get a modern Professional Radio Servicing Instrument. My fifty-fifty method—half working with Radio parts, half studying my lesson texts—makes learning Radio at home interesting, fascinating, practical.

Find Out How I Train You for Good Pay in Radio

Mail the coupon below. I'll send my 64-page book FREE. It tells about my Course; the types of jobs in the different branches of Radio; shows letters from more than 100 of the men I trained so you can see what they are doing, earning. MAIL THE COUPON in an envelope or paste on a penny postal!

J. E. SMITH, President
Dept. 1NM, National Radio Institute
Washington, D. C.

EXTRA PAY IN ARMY, NAVY, TOO

Every man likely to go into military service, every soldier, sailor, marine should mail the Coupon Now! Learning Radio helps men get extra rank, extra prestige, more interesting duty at pay up to 6 times a private's base pay.

THIS **FREE** BOOK HAS SHOWN HUNDREDS HOW TO MAKE GOOD MONEY

J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. 1NM
National Radio Institute, Washington, D. C.

Mail me FREE without obligation, your 64-page book "Rich Rewards in Radio." (No salesman will call. Write plainly.)

Name ..... Age.....

Address .....

City ..... State.....

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

VOL. 4
NO. 1

Fantastic ADVENTURES

TRADE MARK REGISTERED

Contents for January, 1942

STORIES

THE DAUGHTER OF GENGHIS KHAN (Novel) ..... by John York Cabot 8
The lovely girl who claimed to be Genghis Khan's daughter could conjure dragons from a fire urn.

THE HOUSE OF FIRE (Novelet) ..... by Robert Moore Williams 40
These weird fires came out of nowhere—but too close to the great explosives factory for comfort!

SPOOK FOR YOURSELF (Novelet) ..... by David Wright O'Brien. 70
"I'll bring you four-leaf clovers," he promised. Then he flew away to death in a plane crash . . .

THE CONTRACT OF CARSON CARRUTHERS (Short) ..... by William P. McGivern.. 90
Usually the devil buys souls. Carruthers thought he was slipping when all he wanted was his body!

V IS FOR VENGEANCE (Short) ..... by Duncan Farnsworth.... 102
Two thousand years is a long time to wait for a conspiracy to achieve its delicately planned purpose.

RAINBOW OF DEATH (Novelet) ..... by Don Wilcox 110
The rainbow was innocently beautiful, but something horrible was in the mist that gave it birth.

FEATURES

The Editor's Notebook..... 6
Romance of the Elements..... 69
Leave It to the Lizards..... 109
Warfare in the Water..... 134
Don't Swat Too Freely..... 136
Introducing the Author..... 139
Reader's Page 140
Correspondence Corner 144

Front cover paintings by H. W. McCauley, illustrating a scene from "The Daughter of Genghis Khan."
Illustrations by H. W. McCauley; Jay Jackson; Robert Fuqua; Magarian; Rod Ruth.

Copyright, 1941
ZIFF-DAVIS PUBLISHING COMPANY
Member of the Audit Bureau of Circulations

William B. Ziff, Publisher; B. G. Davis, Editor; Raymond A. Palmer, Managing Editor;
Herman R. Bollin, Art Director; H. G. Strong, Circulation Director.

We do not accept responsibility for the return of unsolicited manuscripts or artwork. To facilitate handling, the author should inclose a self-addressed envelope with the requisite postage attached, and artists should inclose or forward return postage. Accepted material is subject to whatever revision is necessary to meet requirements. Payment for manuscripts and illustrations will be made at our current rates.
The names of all characters that are used in short stories, serials and semi-fiction articles that deal with types are fictitious. Use of a name that is the same as that of any living person is coincidental.

FANTASTIC ADVENTURES JANUARY, 1942

FANTASTIC ADVENTURES is published monthly by ZIFF-DAVIS PUBLISHING COMPANY at 608 South Dearborn Street, Chicago, Ill. Washington Bureau, Occidental Hotel, Lt. Col. Harold E. Hartney, Manager. Entered as second class matter April 16, 1940, at the Post Office, Chicago, Illinois, under the Act of March 3rd, 1879. Subscription $2.40 a year (12 issues); Canada, $2.90; Foreign, $3.40. Subscribers should allow at least two weeks for change of address. All communications about subscriptions should be addressed to the Director of Circulation, 608 South Dearborn St., Chicago, Ill.

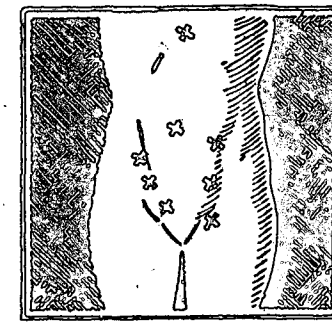
VOLUME 4, NUMBER 1

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

IS YOUR Rupture GETTING Worse?

It is a terrible thing to feel that your rupture is getting worse, growing larger and larger, without your *seeming* to be able to do anything about it! Haunting fear destroys mental poise and makes many *despondent*. Inability to be active takes the *physical joys* out of life.

Yes, it is terrible . . . but far more a tragedy when it is all *so absolutely needless!* Now please—and again please—do not think that this is an attempt to capitalize on your misfortune in an effort to just sell you something. We simply have information for you that has brought deliverance and joy to about 3,000,000 persons: men, women and children . . . *facts* that have satisfied thousands of doctors . . . facts we want *you* to consider, to your everlasting good!



X Where's YOUR Rupture?

STOP IT, STOP IT!

AS sure as you live and breathe, if you have a reducible rupture, you can *stop your rupture worries* and once again find the world, your work, your pleasures so full of joy and happiness that you will be an utterly new person . . . alive, vivid, energetic and happy past all the old nightmare fears that have been making your existence a bad dream.

There is no claptrap magic about the famous Brooks Air-Cushion Rupture Appliance. It isn't something experimental. It has been used and improved for years. Over 9000 doctors (who know about rupture) wear the BROOKS, or recommend it to many, many thousands of patients. What is the Patented Automatic Air-Cushion? Just this.

It is the part of the BROOKS Appliance that holds back your rupture — the most important part of any truss. It is a yielding, air-filled rubber chamber designed to a shape that clings, that holds with complete security *without gouging in.* Understand that — *without gouging in!* Ill-fitting, incorrectly designed trusses, as you know all too well, *do* gouge in.

Now here is what happens. The Brooks Air-Cushion *avoids* spreading the rupture opening and making it larger, the way some trusses do. Well, when the BROOKS permits the edges of the rupture opening to remain as close together as possible, Nature has the best chance to step in and close the opening. Mind you we don't guarantee this. But if you have reducible rupture, the BROOKS is designed to work with nature. And thousands of BROOKS users have reported the abandonment of any truss.

WRONG

Hard pad gouging in keeps Rupture open and prevents natural healing.

RIGHT

BROOKS Air-Cushion does not spread rupture opening. Gives nature a real opportunity!

YOU CAN BE SURE OF NEW FREEDOM

The very day you put on a BROOKS Patented Air-Cushion, you feel that you have been reborn to the full joys of life! Men, women and children can know this indescribable thrill. Now why—why does the BROOKS give you such exceptional results? Why is it so often most outstanding in its accomplishments? Because the cling of the Air-Cushion makes it hold as nothing else can . . . because the wearer speedily comes to realize that there can be no slipping to let the rupture down . . . that while the BROOKS protects, the dreaded specter of strangulation is banished . . . because the wearer can indulge in every normal activity . . . because physical tasks can be resumed . . . because common sense says that everything humanly possible is being accomplished to improve the rupture condition. And here is another "because," a tremendous one to those who have suffered with the miseries of a hard, gouging, burning, galling pad that never lets up, never is forgotten. Your BROOKS will have no springs, no metal girdle, no agonizing pressure devices. Instead there is the utterly comfortable Air-Cushion and a velvet soft body band.

SENT ON TRIAL!

That's one of the best parts of all. You don't have to risk your money to find out just what joy and happiness a BROOKS CAN BRING YOU! You simply try it, and if not satisfied *the trial costs you nothing!* And anyone can afford a BROOKS. It costs no more than ordinary trusses. Every BROOKS is made to individual requirements, made especially to fit *your case.* Therefore it is *never sold in stores.* Guard against imitations. SEND THE COUPON AT ONCE.

BROOKS APPLIANCE CO.
152 STATE STREET MARSHALL, MICH.

MAIL THIS COUPON NOW!

Brooks Appliance Co.
152 State St., Marshall, Mich.

In PLAIN ENVELOPE, please send your FREE BOOK on Rupture, PROOF of Results, and TRIAL OFFER. No one is to call on me personally about my rupture.

Name .....

Street .....

City ..... State .....

State whether for Man ☐, Woman ☐, or Child ☐.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Editor's Notebook

A CONFIDENTIAL CHAT WITH THE EDITOR

SOMEHOW your editors have a feeling about this January, 1942 issue of *Fantastic Adventures;* a feeling that we've set a standard that's going to be a little hard to maintain throughout the whole year.

Starting with the cover, which is one of McCauley's famous Mac Girls, and one of his best, we've got plenty to rave about. There's the return of David Wright O'Brien, who's been markedly absent lately from our pages, but who promises to appear more often from now on, with a delightful yarn that we think ought to rank somewhere in that category called "stories we'll remember for a long time". Oh, yes, it's a ghost story, but remember what you said about Williams' "Mr. Murchison's Ghost"? Well, O'Brien apparently took Bob's story as a challenge, and turned out to compete with it. We'd like to know what you think about whether or not he has succeeded.

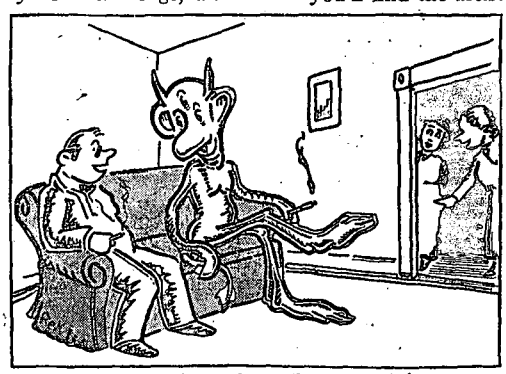
THEN there's Don Wilcox with a story he claims is as good as his "Secret of the Stone Doll", and if he's right, then he's got something!

VERY soon Virgil Finlay is coming to *Fantastic Adventures.* We know many of you believe him to be the top fantasy artist in the business. For those of you we ought to point out that the January issue of *Amazing Stories* features two of his illustrations, and we believe them to be some of his finest work. Why not pick up a copy right now, and check on us?

ALSO, that issue is a special giant issue with 96 added pages. You might pick it up and give us your opinion, and tell us whether you'd like to have us do the same things in *Fantastic,* say along about our third birthday, in May? Or maybe there's something else you'd like to suggest?

NEXT month we have a strange, but good, combination of cover artists. Robert Fuqua has conceived a cover which is a real fantasy in itself. And when we saw it, we immediately pictured it with a Mac Girl in it, and presto, we called McCauley in and said: "How about it?" You'll see the result in February. And we know you'll like it. Incidently, three authors tried to do a story for it, and two of them failed. It was a problem, we'll admit. Personally, we wouldn't like an editor who gave out *such* assignments!

AND in March we hope to bring you the last novel in the Carson of Venus series by your old favorite, Edgar Rice Burroughs. Cover of course, is by J. Allen St. John.



"Since John got that job at Fantastic Adventures, he brings the oddest people home to dinner!"

WHEN you turn to page 139 of this issue you'll find the artist who has evoked so much comment from the readers. Some of them have accused us of "creating" an artist—that Margarian does not really exist. Others of imitation of Finlay. Others of a "fake" name; real artist, but pen name of another well-known artist. Well, we expect that the secrets revealed on page 139 will scotch all of these rumors, and surprise a lot of you. Especially "his" picture!

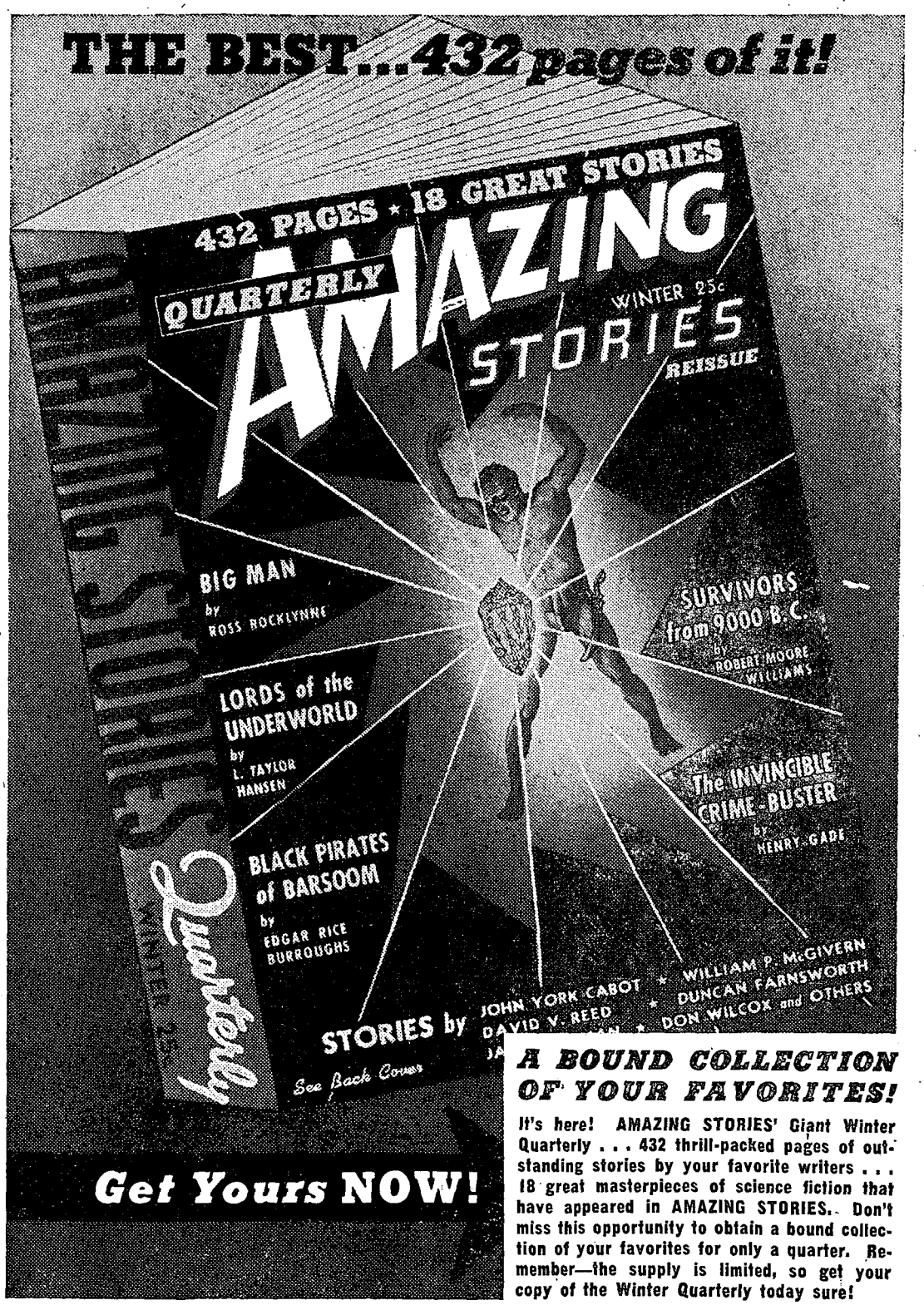
WE HAVE a letter from Nicholas E. Kenealy, of the army, who is also a fan. One thing he says is very interesting. He says: "I am now the pariah of organized fandom. You see, I made so bold as to agree with you on biased fanmag reporting. I was a pariah anyway, because I *read* (oh horrors) those awful promags. Besides, the rest of the fans say that you have to be under fourteen to appear in *Fantastic's* pages, and here I am, on the other side of twenty-one."

WE have never seen anything like the fantasy fan. They don't just read like western or detective story readers; they put out fanmags of their own, write "hot" letters to the editor, argue between themselves, found new "world orders," and discuss everything from safety pins to the content of Mars' atmosphere. It gives spice to

(Continued on Page 88)

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE BEST...432 pages of it!

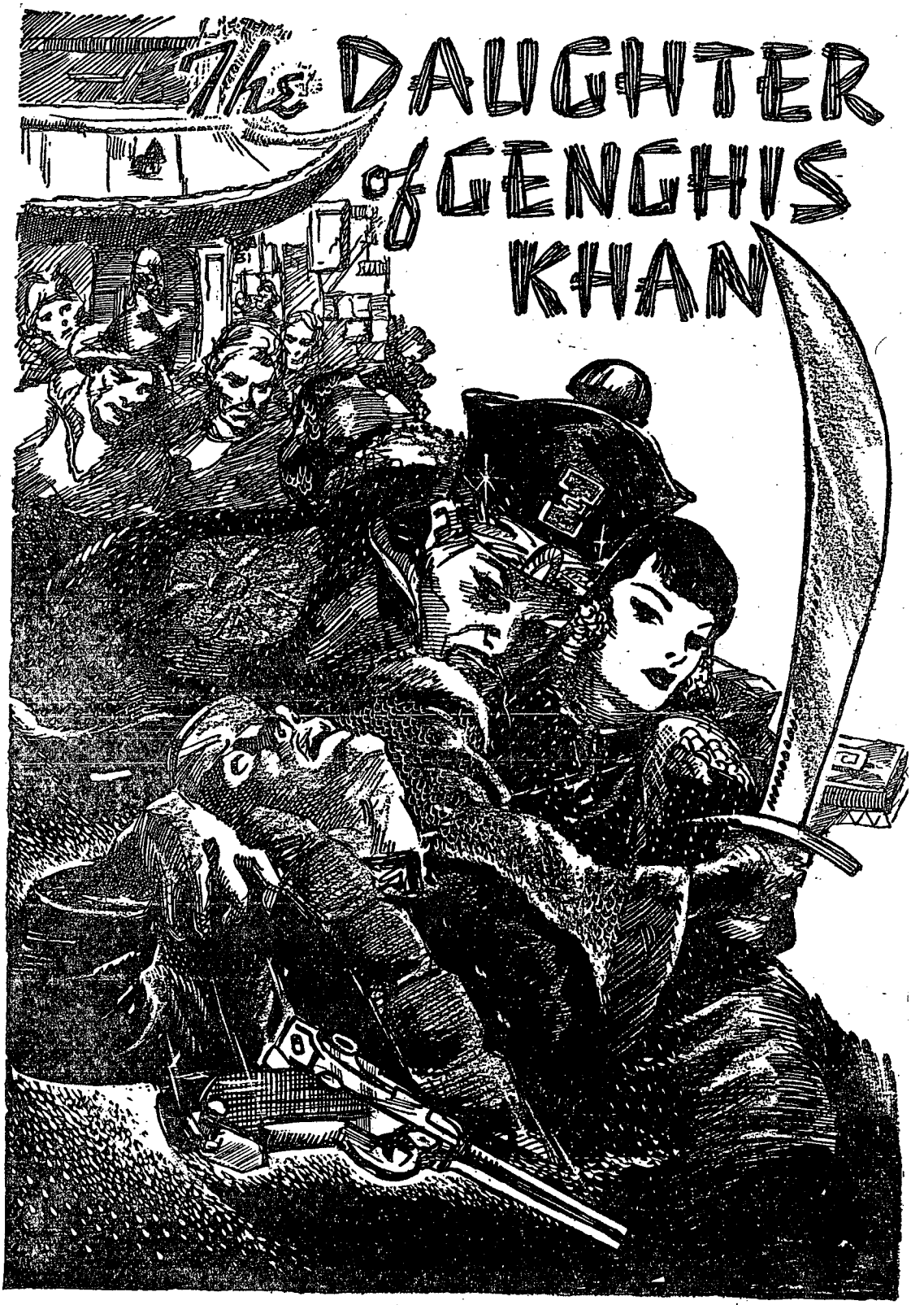


A BOUND COLLECTION OF YOUR FAVORITES!

It's here! AMAZING STORIES' Giant Winter Quarterly . . . 432 thrill-packed pages of outstanding stories by your favorite writers . . . 18 great masterpieces of science fiction that have appeared in AMAZING STORIES. Don't miss this opportunity to obtain a bound collection of your favorites for only a quarter. Remember—the supply is limited, so get your copy of the Winter Quarterly today sure!

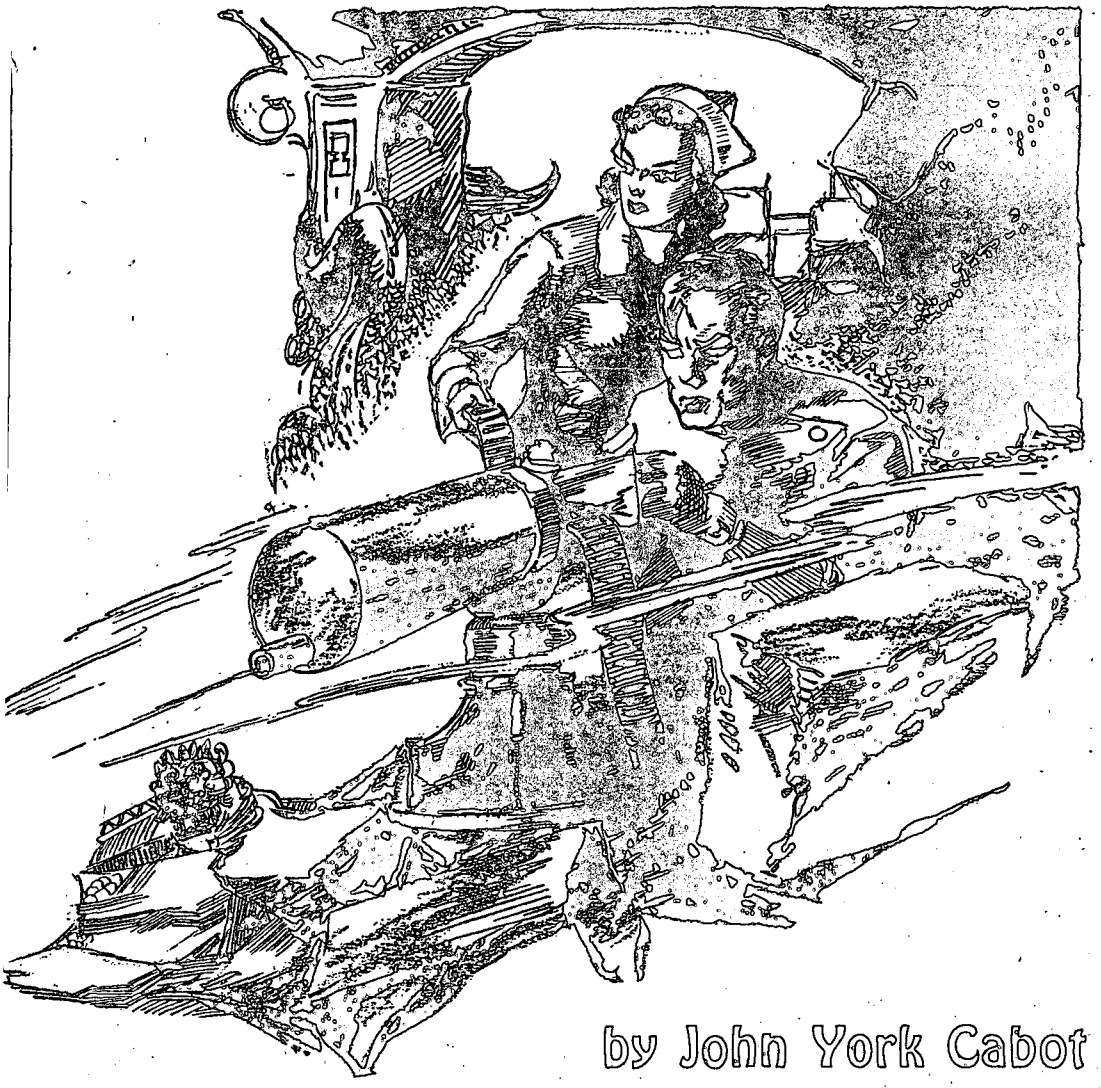
Get Yours NOW!

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



The machine-gun covered their rush across the courtyard

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



by John York Cabot

The fate of China depended on a ghost—or was this lovely girl and her dragon *real?*

"DOCTOR," a ragged, ill-uniformed messenger from General Wong's Chinese Nationals appeared at my shoulder and gave a half salute,

"Doctor," he repeated, "the General wishes to see the American Doctor outside."

A shell burst somewhere within a four hundred yard radius of our hospital. There was a prolonged staccato of rifle fire immediately after it. I had to raise my voice for him to hear my answer.

"Tell him I am at work," I shouted. "Tell him to come in here if he wishes to see me!"

The ragged soldier looked dubious. He had the flat face and wide nose of a peasant from the outer provinces. He half saluted once more and left.

I went back to cauterizing the slashed

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

leg of an old crone on my right. I had to use raw alcohol to sterilize the wound. But her faded old eyes were expressionless as I swabbed the fluid into the deep slash. There would be little I could do to prevent gangrene from setting in.

The little village of Tinchan had been under Jap bombardment for twenty-four hours now, but the ramshackle building we were using as a hospital was still somehow unscathed.

I was working in the main dormitory. The main dormitory, that is, if you can call a louse-ridden barn covered with straw matting in lieu of beds a dormitory. There must have been several hundred victims, all of them noncombatant peasants, lying along the walls of this main room in various states of mutilation and near death.

There was no whimpering, no moaning, even though our scant supply of pain-dulling sedatives had given out ten hours ago. In China the wounded and dying carry their stoicism even into death.

It was already dark, and so I had to administer what little medical attention was in my power by the flickering unsteadiness of smoky kerosene lamps hanging from the rafters.

I had a little cheap rum left, and I gave it to those who needed it most—those on whom I would have operated speedily if we'd still had our operation equipment.

Linda Barret was over on the other side of the room, changing the bandages on the bloody stump that had once been a child's arm. Her face was white and drawn from fatigue, and one cheek was smudged from the soot of a lamp she'd filled a moment before. Her red hair was disordered and her tunic torn badly at the elbow.

She looked nothing like the Boston Back Bay debutante who'd joined my Red Cross unit in Shanghai four months before.

I bandaged the crone's leg then, and when I stood up I saw General Wong entering the place. He wore a faded blue uniform that fitted his squat, fat frame too snugly. There was a black Sam Browne belt to embellish his attire. A huge automatic hung holstered from his side. He glanced unemotionally at the wounded, saw me, and started over toward me.

"Doctor," he said in his deep voice when he was four feet from me, "Doctor, I must advise you to leave Tinchan. The enemy will arrive inside of a half hour."

General Wong had been a despot war lord, a typical hill bandit, until the invasion. Then he'd thrown his military force in on the side of the Nationals. His face was deeply pockmarked, round and moonlike, and his eyes had the glaze of one who enjoys opium. Like Chiang Kai Shek, he'd risen from the ranks of the peasantry. But unlike the leader of the Nationals, Wong had risen by force rather than brains.

I shook my head.

"Sorry, General Wong. I'm staying here." I waved my hand to indicate the wounded lying all around us.

General Wong's moon face registered annoyance.

"The enemy forces will have the village in another half hour," he insisted. "You leave. Come with me."

I wasn't certain, but I thought I saw his eyes flick toward Linda Barret.

"Must you lose Tinchan?" I asked. "Your forces far outnumber those of the enemy troops besieging the village."

"Doctor Saunders," Wong snapped angrily, "you will please leave military decisions in my hands. Your field is medicine."

I nodded.

"That's why I'm staying," I said. "Here."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

GENERAL WONG sucked in his breath.

"As you want it," he said. "My troops have already started withdrawing. You will have our protection if you join us. If you remain here I will not be responsible."

"I will remain here, General," I repeated.

General Wong started to wheel, then turned back.

"The American girl. Will you permit her to risk her life?" He pointed at Linda.

I raised my voice.

"Linda," I called.

Linda Barrett looked up quizzically, then came over to us.

"The General," I said, "is evacuating Tinchan. He wishes us to leave with him. I told him I was staying. He's offered you the protection of his armies if you care to go along."

Linda has blue eyes. They examined the squat, fat figure of General Wong indignantly.

"Of course not," she snapped. "I'll stay right here with Doctor Saunders. Thank you just the same, General."

Wong's lips went flat against his teeth.

"Very well!"

He saluted and left.

"So General Wong is giving up Tinchan to the enemy?" Linda said. There was contempt in her voice.

"There might be some risk in your staying here, Linda," I said. "It would be safer with Wong."

"Wong can run in the face of the Nipponese," Linda said, "but I won't, Cliff. You should know that by now." Her tone was reproachful.

I nodded.

"Yes, I know, Linda. I've a lot to be grateful for in the help you've been. I don't know what I'd have—"

"Enough of that," Linda cut in swiftly. She was suddenly all woman of steel again. Then she asked me some question about our rapidly diminishing store of bandages.

"We've enough for the moment," I answered. "But when we're finally out of it, I don't know what we'll do."

"Perhaps the Japs will—" Linda began.

I shook my head.

"You've been in China only six months, Linda," I reminded her. "I've been here better than four years now. We can expect no help from the invaders. In fact we'll be lucky to be permitted to continue, if their effort to close up the Burma Road is successful."

Linda sighed.

"I guess you're right, Cliff."

I was speaking half to myself now. "And if Wong keeps pulling his forces away in retreat, they'll be able to cut the artery on the Burma Road within a month."

Linda's jaw set.

"Why did he retreat from Tinchan, Cliff? Why did he retreat when his forces outnumber the advance Japanese units by at least two to one?"

I shrugged.

"I asked him that," I answered. "If he had a reason he wasn't giving it out."

Linda shook her head dubiously.

"I don't like General Wong. And it isn't because of his bad breath, which seems to be the result of too much rice wine and opium."

"Neither do I," I agreed. "But the Nationals have to depend on him to carry the fight in this sector for another month."

Another shell burst close to the hospital—a little too close for comfort this time. Linda turned and went back to her patients. I got busy also. The shelling grew heavier during the next fifteen minutes, and now and then I

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

paused long enough to take an anxious glance up at the swaying kerosene lamps hanging from the rafters.

IT MUST have been about five minutes after the shelling had reached its most violent pitch that it suddenly stopped. I knew what that meant. The last of General Wong's troops had left Tinchan, and the Japs were entering the town. They'd stilled their artillery fire. Now there was only the occasional outbreak of rifle volleys, which came nearer and nearer to the hospital, to indicate that the Japs were mopping up on whatever small sniping nests Wong had left behind to cover his retreat.

I finished dressing the wounds of the last patient along the aisle on which I'd been working. I went down to Linda, then, who had also been busily rushing through the changing of the dressing on a youngster's foot.

She straightened up, speaking in Cantonese to the youth.

"It is all right now. You must try to rest. Don't move it."

"Linda," I said.

She turned around.

"That should be an amputation, Cliff. I don't suppose it can be done, however."

I shook my head.

"Not without the proper instruments. I took a look at the boy's foot an hour or so ago. Look, Linda, the Jap troops are already in the village."

"Yes," Linda said coolly. "I heard them mopping up."

"Don't you think you'd better go up into the supply room on the second floor?" I asked. "I'll handle them when they come into the hospital. If they saw a young white woman here—"

"No," Linda said, breaking in and shaking her head emphatically. "I'll be quite all right."

I pointed to the holstered snub automatic that hung from her waist.

"You've that to use if anything goes wrong," I reminded her. "There's always a bullet left, remember."

Linda touched my arm.

"I know, Cliff. A bullet for myself. But cheer up, I don't think there'll be trouble."

I forced a smile.

"Probably not. At any rate you're safe as long as I'm around. I just reminded you in case something might happen to me." Inwardly I shuddered at the recollection of the plunder and ravaging I had seen on one horrible occasion in the village of Hoyang about a year ago.

And suddenly Linda's mouth went straight and she was looking fixedly over my shoulder.

"Here they are, Cliff!" she whispered.

I wheeled, and saw three short, helmeted soldiers of Nippon, rifles held in readiness, striding into the hospital through the front entrance!

Briefly I squeezed Linda's arm.

"Stand here," I said. "I'll talk to them." Quickly I went toward them.

THEY saw me almost immediately, their eyes sweeping over me in hostile suspicion. I realized I had an automatic pistol strapped in a holster around my waist. I took a deep breath. These Japs, depending upon whether or not they were of average intelligence, might just take a pot shot at me because I was armed. But there was the American flag and the Red Cross emblem on the outside of the ramshackle hospital. They must have seen that.

All three had stopped dead, and stood waiting indecisively, their fingers flexing around the stocks of

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

their rifles restlessly.

I shouted to the foremost of them.

"American Hospital. Red Cross. American Hospital. Neutral!"

The foremost soldier was shorter than the rest. He had a small black scrub of a moustache that was barely discernible under the grime that covered his yellow features. I saw him glancing over my shoulder at Linda. My spine stiffened in sudden chill.

"Bring your commander," I shouted. My Nipponese was very faulty at best, but I tried a little of it, repeating my previous words and the final request.

The black moustached Jap frowned, nodded. He turned to his two companions and said something in a Jap dialect unfamiliar to me. Then he turned back to me.

"Commander," he said with a little difficulty. He turned away then and started for the entrance to the hospital, leaving me facing the two remaining soldiers. I breathed a mental prayer that he was off to find his commanding officer.

I could see the two companions of the moustached Jap soldier looking past me at Linda, and from the manner in which their eyes shifted I knew that she was moving around, tending to the wounded. Finally, after what seemed an eternity of waiting, the little Jap who'd gone to get his superior officer returned. Behind him, in an immaculate uniform, was a brusque, bespectacled, slightly taller Jap. His insignia showed him to be a captain in the emperor's army.

The bespectacled Jap captain wore highly polished field boots which somehow hadn't been caked by mud. He shoved past his underling and marched up to me.

"I am Captain Yokura, Japanese Imperial Army," he announced in perfectly flawless English.

"I am Doctor Saunders, American Red Cross unit here in Tinchan," I replied. I extended my hand.

The little officer shook my hand briefly, lightly, seeming to study me from behind the thick lenses of his spectacles. Then he looked around the hospital room.

"Tragically unnecessary," he said. "Slaughter always is."

I nodded.

"Yes, I know."

Captain Yokura shook his head.

"They will never learn, these Chinese, that we are here for their own good."

That was ironic. It was my turn to look around the room.

"Are you?" I asked.

"You Americans can't seem to understand either," Captain Yokura said, catching the sarcasm in my tone. "And the sooner you do so, the better it will be for all of Asia." A sharpness had entered his voice.

"Perhaps our ideologies differ," I said.

"Not to a great extent," Yokura said. "I was at Princeton, in the States, for four years. I had plenty of opportunity to study your democratic philosophies."

THIS conversational sparring wasn't helping things any. I got to the point.

"Will our Red Cross unit be allowed to continue in this sector?" I demanded.

Captain Yokura shook his head.

"I am very sorry, but all we can offer you, Doctor Saunders, is safe conduct to another sector. You cannot remain here."

"But—" I began indignantly.

"You cannot remain here," Captain Yokura repeated with finality. "We will escort you and your assistant, the

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

young lady back there, to another and less, ah, dangerous sector. You should be grateful for that."

"And if we refuse to leave?" I demanded.

"It would be troublesome," Captain Yokura promised ominously, "to all of us, but especially to you and the young lady. You would be wise to question my order no further, Doctor."

"And what about these poor devils?" I gestured to indicate the wounded who filled the room.

Yokura swept a glance over the Chinese peasants. A glance that held no sentiment, no pity.

"Our medical staff will take care of them," he declared.

"The same way that your medical staff took care of wounded peasants in the Hunang sector?" I asked. That incident, which occurred less than five months before, had been brutal butchery.

Captain Yokura shrugged.

"That is up to us."

I felt a surge of futile rage sweeping over me.

"Then I am not leaving this hospital, Captain," I said hotly.

The captain merely turned and barked something to his three soldiers. Their gun points were instantly trained on my forehead.

"You will call the young lady," Yokura said, "and then the two of you will leave. I'll personally escort you to the adjoining sector."

I must have been trembling slightly from the rage I felt. I looked at the muzzles of the guns that pointed at me. Captain Yokura must have read my mind.

"Please don't do anything silly," he said. "Remember the young lady. Call her, please, and we'll get started."

Reminding me of Linda, as he'd done, served as a dash of cold water on my rage. I gave in. There was nothing else I could do. Captain Yokura was smiling unpleasantly at his minor victory. I turned and called to Linda. . . .

CHAPTER II

Captured

THE night along the rutted roadside was pitch black. No stars were out, and the moon was hidden deep behind a thick gray bank of ominous storm clouds.

Far behind us was the little village of Tinchan. By looking back over my shoulder, I could see the tiny fires that had already been started there by the invaders. I tried not to think of the pillage and carnage that was probably under way by now. I also tried very hard not to think of the "attention" the poor peasant casualties who'd been my patients were receiving from the Jap "medical staff" of Captain Yokura.

Linda was beside me, and the two of us sat in the rear of an open touring car of European military make. Beside us was Captain Yokura, and in the small seats facing us, two armed soldiers whose purpose was evidently to see neither that Linda nor I attempted any stupid effort to return to Tinchan. Another two soldiers sat in front, one of them driving.

I had explained the situation to Linda, of course, and she'd readily understood that there'd been nothing else to do. Her rage at our treatment, however, had been as great as mine. She'd made no secret of the contempt she'd had for Captain Yokura and his forces.

But that had all seemed to heighten Yokura's efforts to keep the proceedings on a tone of exquisitely hypocritical cordiality. He kept up a con-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

stant stream of chatter to us from the moment we'd left the burning village of Tinchan in his motor escort.

Now, two hours away from the village, his chatter hadn't lessened. He'd told us about his Princeton experiences, told of his opinions on various matters pertaining to American government, and laid a great deal of emphasis on clarifying what he seemed to consider our "American lack of understanding" concerning Japan's "Great Mission in China."

I hadn't bothered to say much, and neither had Linda. However, that hadn't dampened Captain Yokura's conversational leanings in the slightest. He was in the middle of his explanation about the military strategy he employed in the taking of Tinchan when, suddenly irritated beyond bounds, I broke in.

"Your capture of Tinchan, Captain," I said, "was a farce. Your armies were greatly outnumbered by General Wong's forces. He could have held the city indefinitely, except for what seemed to be a peculiar willingness to turn over the place to you."

Captain Yokura's mouth had been half open to speak. He paused, giving me a suspicious glance.

"Apparently, Doctor Saunders, you are not much of a military observer. General Wong's troops lost the town because of my superior strength in artillery."

"General Wong had more artillery than you did. However, it was never in proper range to be effective. In addition to that, the general killed a junior officer for suggesting that he change the range. The general called the suggestion 'insubordination under fire,'" I concluded.

MUCH of Captain Yokura's hypocritical affability vanished. The corners of his mouth went tight.

"For a neutral, Doctor Saunders, you seem to possess a great deal of military information."

"I'm not completely a damned fool," I answered.

"I don't think your attitude is particularly healthful, Doctor."

"Neither am I a coward," I snapped.

Captain Yokura sucked in his breath regretfully.

"I shall be forced to turn you over to our Military Intelligence when we reach the adjoining sector," he said. "You are too full of, ah, erroneous information."

And suddenly Linda broke in.

"Please include me in that party, Captain Yokura," she blazed. "I'm awfully anxious to see how far you can fly in the face of our consular officials. I don't think you'll be pleased by the counter action they take. Your government is trying rather hard to avoid what might be classed as an 'incident' at this particular moment."

Captain Yokura sucked in his breath again, sharply. It was obvious that his dignity had been ruffled by the intrusion of a woman. However, he said nothing in reply. He leaned forward and barked something in Japanese to the soldier driving in the front seat. Then he sat back, looking out at the countryside, keeping his gaze fixedly from either Linda or I.

There was a pass ahead. It was a twisting turn that ran along between the side of a small hill and a huge boulder that was part of the first foothill of a large mountain. The stars were still hidden, and the night was still black. We were driving rather slowly, without the use of headlights. Yokura seemed a trifle anxious and looked back over his shoulder several times to make certain that the small column of some fifty horsemen he'd brought

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

along as a rear guard were within earshot. I could hear the clumping of hooves but faintly, and judged that the horsemen must have fallen about a half-mile behind us.

I looked at Captain Yokura and smiled contemptuously.

Our eyes met and locked for a moment. And if the little Jap officer had had any intention of waiting for our rear guard to come up before venturing through the pass ahead, his awareness of my scorn suddenly made him change his mind. His jaw went tight and he didn't look back again.

Then we were bumping along deeper ruts in the roadway which marked the start of the twisting entrance to the pass. It grew darker as the sides of the pass threw heavy shadows over our automobile. The only sound now was that of the motor.

We turned abruptly, following the twisting course of the road. Then we turned again. I looked down at Captain Yokura. His face was strained.

And then it happened.

TWO sharp rifle shots came. Our car suddenly careened into the granite side of the pass, driverless as the soldier at the wheel slumped forward dead. Captain Yokura was snarling, pulling at the automatic pistol in his belt and trying to reach for the wheel in the same motion. The soldiers who sat facing us were on their feet, and suddenly were thrown into our laps by the collision of the car into the wall of the pass.

I was pushing bodies away from me and trying to get to Linda's side. The car had stopped, motor killed. Yokura had been thrown heavily to one side as one of the soldiers tumbled off balance against his legs.

Then they were all around the car. More than a dozen of them, all carrying rifles.

In the darkness it was hard to make out their faces or uniforms. But they weren't Japs. They wore the tall fur caps of Mongol bandit warriors. I could see Captain Yokura climbing to his feet. He was raising his automatic to fire.

One of the Mongol warriors clubbed him over the head with the stock of his rifle. Yokura sank grotesquely to his knees. I heard his pistol drop to the floor.

The two Jap soldiers tried to leap from the car and take to flight. They were also clubbed down. The bandits were opening the doors of the cars, dragging Captain Yokura's limp form out. Two of them climbed in from the other side. Their rifles were pointed at Linda and me, ordering us out.

"Be very calm, Linda," I muttered inanely. "Be very calm until we see what this is all about." I had my arm around her.

We climbed out of the car, and suddenly arms wrapped around me from behind, and heavy cord was looped around my body. Linda had also been seized. I tried to struggle. It was useless. The cord drew in. With incredible swiftness I was bound and gagged. Then I was being carried like a child up the steep side of the path. I tried to twist and turn, tried to see where Linda was and what had happened to her.

There were horses. The rugged, squat, swift Mongol breed. I was thrown across the back of one of these. Then I saw Linda. She was also bound and gagged, also thrown across the back of a horse.

Another rifle shot, then a sudden pounding of hoofbeats and we were off, racing along a tangled path up the side of the cliff. My eyes and ears and

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

nose were filled with dust. The Mongol bandit who rode the horse to which I was strapped, gripped the bonds along my back roughly with one hand so that his burden wouldn't fall off. I was choking as the bandage across my mouth filled with the dirt kicked up by the horses. I shut my eyes and braced myself as best I could against the tremendous jarring my body was taking.

I don't know how long we rode. I lost all track of time or direction. Occasionally the horses slowed to a walk. Again they galloped furiously. Sometimes I was aware that we climbed up along steep paths, other times I knew we raced along broad plateaus. But it was growing harder and harder to fight off the fog that seemed to be pressing in against my brain.

Working at the hospital I hadn't slept in over fifty hours. I wasn't a physically rugged person. Another man might have remained conscious through this beating. But finally blackness closed in around me and I remembered no more . . .

THERE was a humming sensation in my brain, and my head ached dully. I opened my eyes, blinking in the glare of torchlights. Unconsciously I moved, and then I realized I was no longer gagged and bound.

I was lying on a clean grass matting, amazingly soft in spite of the aching I felt in every muscle of my body. There was the pungent smell of food in the room, and rising on my elbow I saw that the small cell in which I was confined contained another grass matting in the far corner. Linda was lying there, asleep, breathing easily.

The odor of food came from four or five rice and chicken bowls in the center of the floor. They were still steaming and must have been recently placed there. Four torches, each in a niche in each corner of the room, provided the illumination.

I realized then that my hands and face had been bathed, and oil apparently applied to the bruises around my wrists and ankles made by the bonds. I sat up, wondering where we were and recalling that the Mongol bandit warriors had probably brought us here.

Rising to my feet, I stretched my aching muscles carefully. Then I went over to Linda. I shook her gently four or five times before she opened her eyes. It took a moment for her to recognize me.

"Cliff," Linda began, looking bewilderedly around the little room. "Cliff, where are we? What's happ—"

I cut in.

"Take it easy, Linda. We seem to be all right for the present. I'm not certain where we are."

"The Mongol bandits," Linda asked, "they brought us here?"

I nodded.

"As far as I can remember. Are you all right?"

Linda started to rise, and I helped her to her feet. She stood there, swaying a little dizzily for a moment. Her face was white and she was obviously a little shaky.

"Yes," she said. "I'm all right. I just feel a little groggy. That was the roughest ride I've ever had."

I pointed to the food in the center of the floor.

"Could you stand a little nourishment?"

Linda shook her head.

"Not at the moment, Cliff. I feel too shaky."

I walked over and picked up some chicken and rice. There were chopsticks with which to dig in. I was famished and badly in need of the strength the food would give me.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"We'd both better have some, like it or not," I said.

"It, it might be poisoned, Cliff," Linda said.

I shook my head.

"If they'd wanted to kill us they'd have done so a lot more easily than by poisoning us now." I offered some to Linda, who accepted dubiously.

"Where do you suppose the little Jap captain, Yokura is?" Linda asked suddenly.

I shrugged.

"He was still alive when I saw him last. They'd dragged him senseless from the car. I imagine he's probably still alive. They'd have shot him there in the pass if they'd wanted to kill him. Instead they knocked him out."

"Do you suppose this will be a ransom kidnaping?" Linda asked.

That was exactly what I was beginning to believe. But I shook my head.

"No. I don't think so." There was no sense in further alarming Linda. "It occurs to me that the bandit Mongols wanted Yokura more than they wanted us. Otherwise why would they have known that a Japanese officer was traveling through the pass in an automobile?"

"Perhaps they're Nationals?" Linda wondered.

I shrugged.

"But there would have been no sense in their taking us along if they were Chinese Nationals," Linda went on thoughtfully. "They'd have known we were neutral members of a medical unit. And besides, those weren't the uniforms of Nationals they wore. They looked more like bandits to me."

I didn't say so, but our captors had looked neither like bandits nor soldiers to me. They looked somehow incongruously fitted to the locality, the circumstances, and the situation. But I kept my doubts from Linda.

"I'm fairly certain they're Nationals. Marauders, perhaps, with a mission to harass and delay the Japanese advance until the Nationals could make another stand at the next town."

Linda shook her head. "I wonder," she said reflectively.

SO DID I. And then, suddenly, there was a sound outside our little cell that indicated our doubts on the matter would be cleared up pretty shortly one way or another—footsteps, then the rattle of a key in the lock of our door!

I looked at Linda. She managed to smile.

"Now we'll know," she said.

I nodded, unable to take my eyes from the door. Suddenly it opened, swinging inward, and a tall, thick-shouldered figure stood framed in the doorway. A figure dressed in thick sheepskin boots, a furry, peaked Mongol hat, and a long, black mandarin gown. He was swarthy-complexioned, with black, shaggy eyebrows, a long, thick, drooping black moustache, a flat wide-nostriled nose, and a square, solid chin. He smiled at us, revealing yellowed, jagged teeth.

"You feel somewhat better after dining?" he asked. His English was without a trace of foreign accent.

I nodded stupidly.

"That is good," he said. "I hope our humble fare did not disgust you too much."

I just stood there, jaw agape, trying to make this out.

"Who are you?" Linda asked suddenly. "And where are we?"

The huge, thick-shouldered, droop-moustached fellow smiled again.

"I am General Moy," he said. "My soldiers unfortunately implicated you two in their raid on the invader scouting automobile. As for where you are at the moment, let us say that you

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

are in our small, but well hidden city."

I was frowning. Moy. General Moy. There was no General Moy in this sector. And as far as I knew there was no General Moy within three provinces of this sector. In addition to that, his costume was also puzzling. Most oriental war lords affected western military uniforms, no matter how small their command.

General Moy saw my frown.

"I see I am somewhat of an enigma, eh?" He smiled affably. "No matter, I can understand your bewilderment. You were probably equally uncertain as to the origin of my soldiers." He touched his long, drooping, black moustache. "The Japanese captain Yokura was also exceedingly baffled by it all."

"When can we expect release, General?" I demanded. "Obviously your soldiers weren't aware of it, but I'm sure you realize that we're members of an American medical unit working among the war-torn cities of your people."

General Moy nodded pleasantly.

"I am aware of that. You are Doctor Saunders. The young American girl is Miss Barret. I am sorry to say, however, that we must detain you here for several days. But you will be extended the full courtesies at our command."

"Several days?" I asked.

General Moy nodded again.

"Until one of my, ah, contemporaries arrives here. I believe you've met him. I speak of General Wong, in command of the Nationals in this sector."

"You are working with General Wong?" I asked.

General Moy smiled.

"Not exactly. But General Wong will be here shortly, thanks to some very valuable information we, ah, extracted from the Japanese captain, Yokura."

I WAS beginning to get some slight idea of what was going on. General Moy apparently had a hunch about Wong's probably deliberate effort to allow the Japanese to take control of this sector. Perhaps General Moy was sent here especially to take over Wong's command. But why in this fashion? Why so circuitously?

General Moy again read the bewilderment I felt. He smiled.

"In a little while," he said, "you will probably understand more about this situation. In the meantime, providing you have eaten enough, I will ask you to come with me."

I looked at Linda.

"Miss Barret also," General Moy assured me.

"Very well," I said, and with Linda beside me, and General Moy leading the way, we stepped out of the room. There was a corridor just outside the door of the room in which we'd been held. And we walked down this for perhaps fifty yards to a door at the end.

General Moy opened this door, and a sudden chilling blast of cold night air sent a shiver up my spine. We were out in an open court. An open court perhaps two hundred yards long and a hundred yards wide. There were soldiers and Mongol horsemen off in the far corner in front of what seemed to be a long row of buildings resembling barracks. And straight acoss from us, in the direction General Moy was leading us, was a tall stone structure built in pagoda style.

"This is the heart of our little city," General Moy said. "We are sheltered by high stone walls on all sides. There is a central gate back beyond those barracks. It's the only entrance. The walls, incidentally, are manned by our finest marksmen."

"But how large is the, ah, city?" I asked.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

General Moy waved his hand.

"About a square mile in all. We're on a mountain plateau, you see."

I looked at the construction of the buildings around the court, particularly the construction of the pagoda-like palace toward which the general led us. There were unmistakable signs of antiquity in the design, color and condition of the stone structures.

"If you don't mind my asking," I said, "how far are we from Tinchan?"

General Moy seemed perfectly at ease to answer.

"Less than a night's ride," he replied.

This was another enigma. Tinchan was close to the mountains, I knew. But with all the knowledge I'd thought I'd had about the vicinity, I had never heard anything about another city, ancient or occupied, being within such a short distance.

"These buildings seem to date back to ancient Mongol vintage," I remarked.

"Many things around here do," General Moy answered with a peculiar smile.

WE WERE less than fifty feet from the pagoda-like structure, now, and two Mongol soldiers appeared at the entrance, holding rifles. They saw General Moy and brought their weapons to a peculiar posture of attention.

We passed through the entrance and into a small hall, lighted only by a single torch before another door. But in passing the soldiers who stood guard at the entrance I'd had time to observe two more peculiarities. The faces of the soldiers were of distinctly mongol strain, and the weapons they held were over half a century old.

We paused before the second door. General Moy opened the door and stepped back.

I gaped foolishly. We were staring down a wide, brilliantly torchlighted aisle of pure white marble. It was all of a hundred yards long, and the center of a palace room that must have been fifty yards wide. The torches were placed every few feet along the side of the aisle, making it a blazing pathway of dancing light.

Somewhere a gong, deep and echoing, sounded forth. There was a sudden almost overpowering scent of heavy incense in the air. Linda grabbed my arm.

"Cliff," she whispered excitedly, "Cliff, at the end of the aisle—"

And then I saw her—the creature at the end of the aisle. The beautifully costumed woman on the exquisitely carved throne of jade. From where we stood she looked like a miniature model of a priceless Chinese carving. She was garbed in mandarin robes of rich gold and purple texture. On her head she wore a tiara of pearls, a crown worthy of a Chinese princess.

I shot at glance at General Moy. He was bowing low, head almost to his knees, arms crossed.

"Our princess," he murmured softly.

CHAPTER III

Daughter of the Conqueror

WE MOVED down that aisle almost in a trance. Linda still had my arm. Our steps were faltering, uncertain. The scent of the heavy incense grew stronger. It was as if we walked in an ancient and long forgotten world. And the woman on the throne of jade was more beautiful than music.

She was smiling when at last we stood before her throne. And it was with a start that I realized she was a girl of no more than twenty. The headdress she wore concealed her hair. But the delicate almond oval of her features, the

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

exquisite line of ripe, red loveliness that was her mouth, and the veiled centuries of mystic knowledge in her eyes gave her a splendor and magnificence that was utterly timeless.

"You are welcome here in the city of Khan," she said. Her voice was quiet, yet musical, like the tinkling of tiny bells. There was no trace of flaw in the liquid English she spoke, and yet I detected the faintest sing-song reed to her inflections.

I stood there stupidly, thinking of something to say. "I am Tangla Khan, daughter of the Conqueror, Genghis Khan," she said.

"Descendant of Genghis Khan?" I blurted.

"Daughter of Genghis Khan," the incredibly beautiful creature corrected me.

I couldn't say a word. I was too stunned. This was too incredible, much along the pattern of a Chinese fairy tale. This girl, scarcely a young woman, calling herself the daughter of China's ancient conqueror!

"You seem incredulous," the girl who called herself Tangla Khan smiled. "In China it is wise never to be incredulous." Again there was that century-old wisdom in her eyes. She waved an exquisite hand in light and graceful dismissal of the topic. "But that is of no great importance."

Of no great importance. As simple as that. But I *believed* her. Looking down at Linda I saw that she also believed this strangely glorious girl. There was something in her eyes, in her voice, in her every gesture that made doubt of what she said utterly impossible. It was beyond my ken, and far beyond the realm of occidental knowledge, but I had to believe. There was no explaining it, but I knew as I stood there looking up at her, knew the moment the first flash of disbelief had passed, that this indeed was the daughter of Genghis Khan!

"You are both Americans," Tangla Khan went on in her tinklingly musical voice, "and I am sorry that circumstances delivered you here. However, within the next several days you will be allowed your freedom. I should like to grant it sooner, but the wait is necessary."

Somehow I'd found voice, and instinctively I was again trying to pierce the veil of this now incredibly staggering mystery.

"We must wait until General Wong is delivered into your hands?" I asked.

FOR an instant the warmth left Tangla Khan's cheeks and her eyes flashed fire. It must have been the mention of Wong's name. For suddenly her composure returned. She nodded slowly, gravely.

"I see that General Moy has told you we are expecting the arrival of the venomous General Wong. Yes, that is true. My soldiers have already arranged a rendezvous with the traitor."

"But—" I began.

Tangla Khan held up her graceful hand, cutting off my words.

"There is much about China that the occidental will never understand, Doctor Saunders. You find yourself tangled in a web of baffling circumstances. But do not endeavor to untangle the web too strongly. There are mysteries which you could never unveil. It is probably just as fortunate." She smiled again.

Somewhere a gong sounded, its muffled echo drifting faintly to us. The scent of perfumed incense seemed to be drifting away.

"Before you leave us," Tangla Khan declared, "I shall see you both once more."

This was a dismissal, I realized. And then Linda and I were moving dazedly

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

down the long aisle of marble, through the brilliant archway of torchlight, back to the door by which we'd entered.

General Moy stood there, head still lowered, waiting for us. As we approached him he raised his head. Then, gravely, he stepped to the door, holding it as we went out.

In the hallway General Moy closed the door of the palace room behind us. Then he turned. Silently the three of us went past the sentries at the outer door.

We were out in the courtyard again. The chill night air was suddenly fresh and invigorating. I felt as though I'd been hypnotized, mesmerized into another world. Now the spell was broken.

Linda was the first to speak.

"I can't help but believe," she said softly, half-incredulous at her own words.

"We who follow the leadership of the daughter of Genghis Khan can believe," General Moy said quietly.

"But she was just a girl," I murmured bewilderedly.

"With centuries of knowledge, centuries of wisdom," the general added. I turned to look at him. His mouth was grave, and in his eyes there burned the flame of fierce fanaticism. "And all put to the aid of China," he concluded.

I felt a sudden chill. It wasn't from the dampening cold.

I TURNED again to General Moy. There were some questions I wanted to ask him. Questions as to why we had been permitted this audience with Tangla Khan, why, in fact we were so unhesitatingly permitted the freedom of this mysterious city of Khan. After all, we were foreigners, unknown foreigners at that, even though our sympathies had been obvious.

I was about to ask this of the general when the silence of the courtyard was suddenly broken by a swift clatter of hoofbeats in the distance.

General Moy cocked an ear.

"My horsemen," he observed, "at the gate to the city."

Through the night there came a weird, half-human cry.

Moy nodded.

"They signal the password to the gatemen."

Moments later the hoofbeats took up again, growing louder and louder. Then riding single file into the court in which we stood, came a party of ten soldiers astride Mongol mounts.

They halted about fifteen yards from us.

"Look," Linda cried, pointing to the lead horseman's saddle. I looked, and saw a fat human burden, tied and gagged, strapped crosswise over the pommel of the saddle. Even from that distance and in the half-darkness of the courtyard I could recognize the prisoner General Moy's Mongol scouts had brought with them. It was the National general, Wong!

Soldiers were hurrying out of the buildings that looked like ancient barracks. Some carried torches, and soon the courtyard was well lighted and teeming with General Moy's troops. The general had left our side and advanced to meet his returned scouting party.

The Mongol warrior who'd ridden the horse to which General Wong had been lashed was unstrapping his captive and dragging him quite unceremoniously off, letting the fat, uniformed body tumble to the ground.

And now the mandarin-costumed General Moy stood towering above the trussed and helpless figure of the traitorous captive.

"Welcome, esteemed general," Moy said loudly.

The ring of soldiers pressing around him laughed loudly at this. Then Moy

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

barked something in Chinese, and several soldiers were bending over the fat figure of General Wong, untying his bonds and helping him roughly to his feet. In the flare of the torchlight I could see General Wong's moon face, flushed with wrath and covered with grime. His faded blue uniform was tattered and badly soiled.

He stood there in the middle of his captors, facing General Moy uncertainly and yet with a certain bluster of braggadocio, a desperate effort at front to conceal the terror he undoubtedly felt.

"You had an oppointment with a certain Japanese captain, Yokura," General Moy was saying. "We have seen to it that you will not miss that appointment, Wong. Captain Yokura is here."

GENERAL WONG seemed suddenly to sag. He looked helplessly from face to face in the ring that encircled him.

"The two of you, Captain Yokura and yourself, can keep your rendezvous in the Temple of the Dragon," General Moy went on coldly. "It will be fitting."

General Wong's face went ashen beneath his pockmarks. Stark terror filled his eyes. He opened his fat lips, seeming to strangle on the words he was trying to say.

"No," he choked in Cantonese, "No! It is not so! It cannot be so! By the graves of my ancestors I swear that I am an innocent man!"

General Moy touched his drooping black moustache. Contempt was in his voice.

"Your ancestors were dogs, Wong. They died unburied!"

Wong was shaking his head from side to side like some squat grotesque rag doll.

"No, no, no," he kept repeating.

"Prepare the pig for the Temple of the Dragon!" General Moy suddenly barked. Then the circle of Mongol warriors closed in around General Wong, dragging him off toward the barrack buildings at the other side of the court. Moy stood there watching them for a moment. Then he turned and came back to us.

"A traitor," he remarked almost conversationally, "is a most unhappy person in China."

"Then Wong was a traitor?" I asked.

General Moy nodded.

"He had been taking silver from the invader forces in this sector for some time. We knew that. Captain Yokura of the Japanese was to meet him tonight in a mountain rendezvous. We extracted that information from Yokura and met him ourselves instead. Quite a surprise party for General Wong."

"You will execute Wong?" I asked.

General Moy gave me that peculiar smile again.

"You might call it that," he said.

I could feel Linda's arm near mine. She was trembling visibly. The strain had been too much. General Moy saw this also.

"It might be wise to take the American Miss to her quarters. She is badly in need of rest," he said. "You will not be locked in, this time, and our small community will be at your service." He bowed slightly from the waist. "If you will excuse me," he begged. Then he turned away and started toward the barrack building to which Wong had been taken.

I put my arm around Linda's waist, and she seemed grateful for support as we crossed the courtyard to the building where we'd first been quartered by General Moy's forces.

"You've gone though a great deal in the last few hours, Linda," I said solicitously.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Linda shook her head gamely, red hair glinting in the torchlight of the hallway as we entered the building.

"Not so much," she said. "I guess I haven't got much of what it takes, Cliff. I could stand the shells and the gunfire and the hospitals and blood. But this mystical whatever-or-other-it-is coming on top of all the rest is a little too much. That girl—she was beautiful, wasn't she, Cliff?"

"You believe that she is the Conqueror's daughter?" I asked.

Linda nodded.

"Don't ask me why, Cliff. But I do. I can't help it. I know it's impossible, but—"

I nodded.

"Yes, I know what you mean. I feel the same way." I paused. "The daughter of Genghis Khan, fighting for China's freedom. It's more than incredible."

WE WERE at the room to which we'd first been taken. I opened the door.

"We should be freed tomorrow," I said. "Wong has been captured, and that was all they were waiting for."

Linda looked up at me.

"Yes," she said faintly, "tomorrow."

"Goodnight, Linda."

"Goodnight, Cliff."

I looked down at her. At the lovely little nose, into her clear, clean, blue eyes. Her lips were half-parted. I felt something akin to dizziness. Then, without intending to, my arms were around her and my lips were against hers. I stepped back after a moment, shaken.

Linda was looking solemnly at me.

"You're a strange duck, Cliff," she said. "Brilliant medico with nerves of steel. Nothing seems to affect you, even the situation in which we now find ourselves. I think you're even too preoccupied to be aware of what's happening in your heart." She closed the door of her room softly.

I stood there, still shaken, staring dumbly at the door. Wondering at what I had done, trying to get sense out of what she had said. There was another room down the hall, and the door was slightly ajar. I stepped inside. It had been prepared for me. There was fresh grass matting on the floor, and food and water and a package of American cigarettes.

Picking up the latter I opened them mechanically, lighted one. But thoughts of sleep or rest were impossible. I decided to get some air. I felt as though I needed it badly.

There was no one in the courtyard when I stepped outside. I walked along, smoking and trying to throw this strange quilt-pattern into a semblance of regularity. This mysterious city, the baffling enigma of General Moy and his leader, the beautiful Tangla Khan. None of it would fit properly.

I was a doctor. My life, since I'd been in China, had been filled with nothing but the unceasing grind of my work in the war sectors. This was the first time I'd been thrown out of pattern in four years. And now there was Linda. For the first time Linda appeared as a woman to me. Before that she'd been nothing more than a valuable aide in my all consuming work. That was out of pattern, too.

And so I walked along, scarcely noticing where I was going, trying to set the confusing series of events straight in my mind, trying to argue myself into a logical state of mind.

Before I realized it, I was at what must have been the end of the little city. There was a tall stone wall before me. It was the protection General Moy had mentioned. I looked along the

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

wall for the entrance. I couldn't see it. Probably at the other side of the city.

I started to turn away, was fishing for a cigarette, when my foot struck something in the shadows. Something solid. Something like a body. I bent down, then gasped.

A Mongol warrior, obviously one of the wall guards, lay there with a knife in his ribs, definitely dead!

I FELT the fellow's hand immediately. It was still warm. My fingers found the wound. The blood was still warm. This guard had been killed less than fifteen minutes ago!

A thousand and one conjectures flooded my mind. Had one of General Moy's captives, say Wong or Yokura, escaped? Or had someone stealthily entered the city?

I didn't know. But there was one thing to do. Tell Moy immediately. I looked around. There were no Mongol warriors in sight. I began to run toward the center courtyard. I was breathless when I arrived there. There were no soldiers in the court. I dashed toward the line of barrack buildings.

There seemed to be no one there.

The pagoda-like building across the courtyard: Moy and his troops must have gone there for some reason. I dashed back across the courtyard. The first door of the pagoda was open slightly. I stepped inside.

Thin, eerie, reed-like music suddenly came to my ears from behind the second door: the door to the palace room of Tangla Khan. And then I heard a low, almost whispered, chanting. Many voices seemed to be providing a background for the reed-like music. I tugged at the door. It seemed locked, or stuck.

The music inside was louder, and so was the chanting. A great gong sounded clashingly. The music grew stranger, faster, the voices catching the beat and rising in pitch. I tugged frantically at that door. It suddenly opened, almost throwing me off my feet.

General Moy's warriors were in Tangla Khan's throne room. They filled the place on either side of the long marble aisle, sitting in the darkness. They were the chanters.

But at the end of the long aisle was no longer the jade throne of the daughter of Genghis Khan. In its place there was now a wide marble platform almost twenty yards in diameter. At the front of this platform, and crouched below it, were the musicians whose instruments were producing the eerie music.

And on the platform itself, centered by the brilliance of the torchlights all around her, was Tangla Khan, daughter of the Conqueror!

She knelt beside a vase, swaying and undulating to the rhythmn of the music and the chanting. Instead of the heavy trappings of the mandarin costume she had worn before, Tangla Khan was now clad in the briefest of barbaric sacrificial costumes, displaying a body that was more beautiful than a cutting in jade.

And now the music was swelling, the voices rising even higher, and for the first time I noticed that the vase beside which the daughter of Genghis Khan knelt was emitting a greenish vapor that writhed toward the ceiling.

I stood there frozen, hypnotized by what I saw and heard.

Tangla Khan undulated her glorious body in a manner that was like flowing liquid, her graceful arms tracing patterns through the greenish vapor of smoke coming from the throat of the vase.

And suddenly I noticed for the first time that two men, the general, Wong, and the Japanese captain, Yokura, were

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tied to pillars of marble in the darkness just off to the right of the platform!

The chanting was almost at a frenzy pitch, and Tangla Khan continued to sway, as if actually moved by the force of the swelling music. *And the greenish vapor of smoke was taking a tangible form!*

I saw the green head and blazing eyes at first, then the winged part of the smoke-spawned Thing. A *dragon,* a green monster from hell, was materializing from the vase!*

AND from the darkness at the side of the platform, where Yokura and Wong were tied, there rose above the wild chanting and wilder music the most hideously soul piercing scream a man has ever uttered!

For the monstrous dragon hovered directly over General Wong, hanging suspended there for a horrible instant, and then wrapped its hideous wings around the traitor, enveloping the poor devil completely!

I saw that Yokura, tied to the next pillar, was slumped limply in his bonds. Undoubtedly he'd fainted.

The voices in the throne room were raised to screaming frenzy. Tangla Khan was rising from her knees, now, still dancing, a savage, primitive fury in her rhythmic writhings.

And suddenly a deafening explosion shook the pagoda to its very foundations. Then another explosion, followed by a stacatto of machine gun and rifle fire.

The chanting faltered, stopped. On the platform, Tangla Khan stood transfixed. The materialization of the dragon had vanished the moment the chanting had faltered. A small wisp of green smoke rose from the vase. But in the shadows the remnants of what had been General Wong splattered the white marble of the pillar, to which he'd been tied. A grizzly reminder that the Thing had been more than a materialization!

The deafening explosions were increasing now. There was shouting in the courtyard, and the soldiers in the throne room were on their feet, swarming toward the door, milling past me, crushing forward in an effort to get outside.

And I suddenly recalled why I'd come here. The knifed guard by the wall and this confusion outside meant that attackers were inside the gates of the little city of Khan!

Sickly, I recalled that Linda was alone and unprotected across the courtyard. I hurled myself against the swarm of bodies pressing toward the pagoda exit. I had to get out. I had to reach Linda!

CHAPTER IV

The Fight in Khan

WILDLY I fought and clawed my way through the press of bodies all around me. Suddenly I was out in

---

* Cliff Saunders was watching the ancient Chinese *Rite Of The Dragon,* a ceremony dating back in Asiatic History to the days of Genghis Khan, the Conqueror. The *Rite Of The Dragon,* banned by the ruling Chinese dynasty in the year 1100, was a ritual designed to seek the help of the worshipped dragon in gaining victory for China over her enemies. The offering of a traitor as a sacrifice to the dragon god was deemed essential to the ceremony, for it was only after feasting on the blood of one who had betrayed China that the dragon god was supposed to hear the plea of its supplicator.

Records of this ancient ritual can be found in the 12th volume of Copperling's *History of China.* The exact nature of the sacrifice, even to the incantations of the rite, is most fully elaborated on, however, in the historical tomes of Chinese legend to be found in the Tibetian monastaries. There, preserved by the venerable monks for many centuries, the complete record of the dragon rite was made known to Marco Polo in his famous journey. Mention of the dragon rite has been found in Polo's writings.—ED.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the courtyard. There were more explosions. Somewhere a machine gun was chattering. And then I noticed that Mongol warriors on every side of me were falling.

The machine gun was directed by the attackers at the pagoda exit. General Moy's men were being slaughtered as they swarmed out into the courtyard. Tiny spurts of dust flicked everywhere around my feet.

But I was running, heedless of this, along the side of the court, trying to work my way around to the building in which I'd left Linda. I stumbled and fell sprawling across the body of a Mongol warrior. My hand touched a sack at the fellow's side as I rose.

Grenades!

I bent down quickly, fishing in the sack. They were the old pin-type grenades. But they were weapons. Weapons this Mongol would never throw now. I waited beside the body, listening, peering through the flashing darkness until I located the position of that machine gun.

Then I pulled the pin, hurling the grenade across the court. There was another deafening explosion. The machine gun was silent. Only rifle fire barked now.

I waited, crouching low, listening to see in what direction the rifle fire was centered. Then I dashed forward again to the concealment of a short stone watering trough less than fifty feet from the building I wanted to reach. There was a dead soldier behind the trough. A Jap. So the attackers were all, or a part, of Yokura's regiment who'd trailed his captors to here!

The slain soldier of Nippon had a rifle he'd no longer need. I grabbed it up, waiting for a pause in the stacatto of rifle fire.

Then I was dashing across the fifty feet of courtyard that lay between the trough and the building where Linda was. I could hear the *zinging* of rifle bullets whining past my head. I was at the door, tugging it open.

Something struck me in the shoulder, flattening me against the door. I felt warm stickiness trickling down my skin. But that was the only other sensation. No pain. I hadn't time to think of pain. I had the door open now, was inside the corridor, slamming it behind me.

I was breathless and a little weak. My white shirt was red at the shoulder. A soldier of Nippon appeared in the corridor, staring at me in surprise. I fired the rifle I held from the hip. He pitched over on his face and the corridor rang from the explosion of the shot.

The door of the room in which I'd left Linda was ajar. I reached it and a helmeted head suddenly appeared. I fired point blank into the face. The Jap didn't even have time to scream. He fell backward as if in slow motion, both hands covering the gruesome red smear that was blotching over his features.

Linda was in the room, standing back against the far wall, eyes filled with terror. There was no one else.

"Cliff, oh Cliff," she cried.

I had my arms around her. "Are you all right?" I kept demanding. "Are you all right?"

Linda nodded, sobbing, holding close to me, burying her face against my bloody shirt.

"Cliff," she sobbed, "you're hurt."

WE WERE out in the corridor again. There was no one there but the Jap I'd killed as I entered. He lay face downward on the floor. Then I saw the machine gun. The two of them, the Jap soldiers, had entered this

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

building to place the gun here to cover the courtyard. They had encountered Linda accidentally. I'd arrived in time.

The gun was mounted on a tripod. The Jap had been standing before it when I'd entered. There were ammunition feeding belts. I dragged the gun to the doorway. Then I went back for the Jap soldier I'd shot in the face. I dragged him from the room and placed him by the door. I got the other body and placed it on top of the first. It was the only barricade I could think of.

I had the machine gun ready behind them, snout pointing over the buttress of bodies.

"Linda," I said. "Get back in the room!"

But she had dropped to her knees on the floor of the corridor beside me. She was already inserting the ammunition belts into the gun.

"Two comprise a gun crew," she said.

I looked at the set of her lovely jaw. There'd be no forcing her to take shelter in a room.

"Okay, honey," I conceded. "But for God's sake keep your head down."

I reached forward and swung the door open. We had perfect command of the entire courtyard. I'd taken my position behind the gun. But I waited an instant or two. I could see General Moy's Mongol forces firing from the pagoda. The panic and disorder that had swept them as they'd piled from the temple was now gone. They'd organized a firing line from the pagoda itself. The men they'd lost lay sprawled in the center of the courtyard.

The Japanese troops were firing from a battle line on the other side, before the barrack buildings. Their flank was exposed to the muzzle of my machine gun.

"All right, Linda," I said. "Here we go!"

I triggered the gun, blazing forth at the Jap line. The fire was devastating.

THE machine gun chattered, eating smoke lines of death along their ranks. Soldiers tumbled sprawlingly in every direction. Panic stricken, those left in the firing line rose and dashed for the shelter of the barracks buildings.

I cut them down as they ran, mowing their legs from under them. It was sickening carnage, but it was our lives or theirs.

And then there was an increased volley of fire from General Moy's Mongol warriors in the pagoda. Ten of them dashed down to the front of the temple, kneeling there, firing at the barracks buildings. Ten more tumbled out, dashing past their comrades who were covering their movements. They stopped about fifteen yards on, dropping to their knees and opening fire in the same manner as the first group.

The first group rose, dashing on some twenty yards beyond the second, who now covered their action. Then they dropped on their stomachs and picked up the fire. They were working toward our building. Now I understood what was afoot. Moy had ordered this retreat from the pagoda the moment he realized that a machine gun had opened fire on his enemies from our building.

The pagoda was a dangerous battle line. General Moy's men were leaving it and moving to our building, which was a much more strategic location. Our building commanded the entire courtyard, the pagoda hadn't had that advantage. Moy was moving his ranks.

More Mongol warriors were leaving the temple, covered in the protective fire of their comrades. I kept triggering the machine gun, giving them all the additional advantage I could. The Jap soldiers hadn't reorganized their

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

firing line as yet. They were still too panic stricken. Their dead lay everywhere about the courtyard. There was a veritable pathway of them leading to the barracks buildings—all sprawled in various postures of death.

And then I checked my machine gun fire, for the first of the Mongol warriors reached our building. They deployed around the sides of the door, then, keeping up their fire to give their comrades a chance to come up.

I began firing again, and from the corner of my eyes saw the last of the Mongols dash from the temple. General Moy was with them, and a small, slim, uniformed figure that could be no one but Tangla Khan.

Linda fed the cartridge chains endlessly into the machine gun all this time. And mentally I was thanking God that the Japs hadn't reached us with their retreating fire. She was completely contemptuous of the danger she risked, utterly disregarding my warning to keep out of range.

THE gun was beginning to smoke, now, and the barrel was almost red hot to the touch.

Two Mongol warriors came from the firing line before the door, signaling me that they'd take over the gun. I relinquished it gladly, for now I'd be able to get Linda out of the way.

I picked up the two out-dated rifles the Mongols had dropped, gave one to Linda.

"Come on," I told her. "We'll get back until Moy reaches us." She hesitated. "Those two will know what to do with the machine gun if it gets too hot," I told her. "I couldn't manage it, and there's no sense in burning it out."

Linda nodded, stepping back with me into the corridor. She was breathing heavily, and her face was smudged with the soot of gun powder. She took me by the arm.

"Come, Cliff. We're going to bandage that shoulder right now."

I started to protest, but it was something that would keep her out of danger for a little while. I nodded.

We went into the room where I'd found her. She turned her back on me for a minute and when she turned around again she had four swatches of silk which she'd torn from her slip.

"For once the doctor is the patient," she said. She tore away the shirt from my shoulder.

"Linda," I said, "forgive me. It's all my damned stupidity that got you into this mess."

"Stop talking, Cliff, and stand still. I wanted to be here. I wanted to be with you. Never thought I'd have to tell you that, but there it is." She was busily swabbing the wound.

I didn't know what to say.

"You're a strange duck, Cliff. I said it last night and I'll say it again," Linda declared. I didn't know whether she was talking to keep me from noticing the fact that my shoulder was badly creased, or actually trying to tell me something.

I didn't know how to answer that. But I had to say something. I told her about finding the Mongol guard by the wall. I glossed lightly over what had happened in the temple—the part about the monster and the hideous fashion in which it had eliminated Wong. I omitted that.

Linda had slept after I'd left her, she told me. The firing at the edge of the city had roused her. She had just dressed when the first explosions started. It was shortly after that that the Japs had entered the building to mount their machine gun. In prowling about the place to make certain they were safe from a rear attack they'd

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

burst into Linda's room.

It must have been terrible for the girl. But her recounting of the incidents was brief. I had broken in just as the Jap I'd shot in the face was starting after her.

The thought of what a few seconds delay in my arrival would have meant made me sick and shaky inside.

FOOTSTEPS were clumping into the corridor, now. Linda finished dressing the wound.

"I think you'll live, Cliff," she smiled. Linda Barret wasn't lacking in nerve when the going got tough.

General Moy appeared at the door. He was breathing heavily. He held a mean-looking automatic pistol in his large hand.

"For a doctor," he said, "you made a magnificent machine gunner. And the young lady deserves our thanks also."

"I tried to warn you of the attack, General," I said. I didn't mention the fact that I'd witnessed the ancient and horrible rites in the pagoda.

"Our stupidity," General Moy declared. "Stupidity that cost us several hundred men. We're taking the machine gun up to the roof of the building. There's what amounts to a small fortress up there. We should be able to mop up the rest of the enemy. I've hand grenade hurlers approaching the barracks where the enemy has taken refuge. They'll approach the place from the rear and blow the devils back into hell."

"I'll get up on the roof, then," I began.

"*We'll* get up on the roof," Linda broke in.

General Moy looked at her in admiration. I shot her a glance of annoyance. But Moy shook his head.

"You'll both remain here. There'll be much you can do when the shooting is over, Doctor."

It seemed strange to hear that last word under these circumstances. I'd been used to being called Doctor for ten years now. A man of medicine, sworn to save lives. And in the last half hour I had *taken* hundreds of lives.

And then another figure was standing in the door—Tangla Khan, looking as beautiful and imperious in a blue uniform as she had ever been in her temple!

"Is everything in readiness, General," she asked in her musically tinkling tones. She seemed not to notice Linda and I.

General Moy bowed from the waist.

"Everything, Empress."

Tangla Khan looked at Linda and me then, as if she'd just noticed us.

"We owe you great gratitude," she said. "China will not forget what you have done for us."

She turned, then, and left.

"The uniform," I stammered, "wha—"

General Moy was grave.

"Wong is dead. His forces at the foot of these mountains are leaderless, in grave peril. The road of supplies is threatened by the invaders."

"The Burma Road?"

Moy nodded.

"If the troops that were formerly Wong's are massacred, China's lifeline will be in the hands of her enemy."

"But the Japanese forces here—" I began.

"They are but one division of the enemy strength in this sector. They were under the command of Captain Yokura. They fight in our city for a twofold purpose, to release their leader and hold off our brigand brigade until the main body of Nationals are chopped to bits."

"But Tangla Khan?" I asked. "Will she—"

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"She will take Wong's command. I am going with her. It is our only chance to repair the damage done by the traitor, Wong. The enemy is closing in on his troops at this moment."

"But the risk you'll run," I said. "It might mean your own destruction."

"China is imperiled," was General Moy's answer.

Moy's words made me redden in embarrassment, realizing the stupidity of my own statement. It was obvious that China's fate hung in the balance, and that for Moy there was no questioning what was to be done.

"But you must break through the Jap division that has you hemmed in your own city," I reminded him.

"I said that hand-grenade hurlers, my best, are flanking the enemy troops in the barracks buildings at this very moment," General Moy reminded me.

There was a sudden explosion. Then another, and a third. The machine gun began chattering furiously. There was a fourth explosion. General Moy stepped into the corridor. From where he stood he had a clear view of the courtyard. I stepped out beside him, Linda with me.

The barracks buildings were a shambles of debris. Smoke hung heavily over the ruins. The grenade men had done their work well. Moy's Mongol warriors had ceased firing. There was only the sound of a few feeble volleys from the Japs still alive in the wreckage of the barracks buildings.

Moy turned. Tangla Khan stood behind us.

"We are ready, Empress," Moy said. "The horses are at the rear."

"You will be safe here," Moy told Linda and me. "The enemy resistance is almost completely wiped out. I'm leaving a superior force to take care of the remainder of them." He shoved his huge automatic into the holster at his belt.

I put my hand on his arm.

"Good luck," I said.

General Moy smiled.

"China will remember," he said.

He turned away, following the slim, uniformed figure of Tangla Khan.

WE WATCHED them step through a door at the end of the corridor. They were followed by four stalwart Mongol soldiers. The shooting out in the courtyard was still sporadic. Occasionally Moy's men on the roof let loose with a staccato of machine gun fire, and intermittently the remainder of the Japs in the barrack building ruins replied with sharp rifle volleys.

There was a clatter of hoofbeats on the cobblestones in the rear of our building. The machine gun on the roof began a steady chattering spray of death down at the barracks building across the courtyard.

Then suddenly, past the door that looked out on the courtyard, General Moy, Tangla Khan, and their escort of the four Mongols all mounted, raced past, under the shield of machine gun fire from the roof.

"They're racing toward the gate!" Linda cried.

I held my breath. The machine gun on the roof kept up its steady hail of leaden death. The Japs weren't being given time to pick out targets on the flying steeds. Then General Moy, Tangla Khan, and their guard were out of sight. The machine gun kept streaming lead across the courtyard, giving them plenty of time to get a start.

I relaxed a little. They'd made it.

And then Linda grabbed my arm, sharply, fingers digging into my flesh.

"Cliff," she gasped, "Cliff, good heavens—look!"

I turned in the direction she pointed, peering across the court to the other

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

side, to the pagoda building.

"My God," I gasped.

Captain Yokura, begrimed, unsteady, and bloody, stood swaying at the entrance to the pagoda! In his hand was an automatic pistol. He looked dazedly around the courtyard.

I couldn't believe my eyes. Yokura—still alive!

How he had been spared by the Mongols of Tangla Khan was more than I could imagine. I recalled that he'd escaped the hideous death in the dragon rite when his troops had taken the courtyard and opened fire on the pagoda. But he'd still been tied to the marble pillar in the temple, beside the horribly mutilated body of the traitor, Wong.

Perhaps, in the confusion and tumult that followed the discovery of the Japanese attack on the village, he'd been left there, temporarily forgotten in the effort at organizing a defense. Perhaps he'd freed himself in the excitement, possibly waiting until General Moy's men and Tangla Khan had left the pagoda for the safety of our building.

But he *was* alive, and the gun in his hand indicated that he was still fighting.

The machine gun on the roof was still spraying the buildings in which the Japs had taken refuge. Obviously the Mongols in command of the gun on the roof hadn't seen Yokura as yet. And obviously the troop of riflemen in front of our building hadn't seen him, for all the fire was being directed toward the beleagured barracks buildings.

And now Yokura was dashing across the courtyard—dashing toward his troops in the barracks!

IT WAS a distance of less than a hundred yards. Yokura covered more than half the distance, in amazing speed, before the first Mongol riflemen noticed him.

They had to shift position to train their fire.

That gave Yokura another thirty yards. Fifteen left—the little Jap captain running like a deer!

The first shots from the Mongol rifles blazed out. Dust spurts kicked up everywhere about him. But he still ran, apparently untouched. And his men in the barracks were now giving him a sort of covering fire. It wasn't much, but it was all that he needed.

Five yards—and Yokura was hit, fell sprawling to the ground!

He moved on, dust still kicking up all around him. Moved on on his hands and knees, covering that extra five yards as best he could. Three Jap soldiers suddenly dashed out to him, forming a screen of flesh around their captain.

One of them got a bullet squarely in the center of his forehead. The other two closed in the gap, keeping that screen. A second fell, shot in the stomach, and the third was suddenly cut to the ground as the machine gun on the roof opened a belated fire.

But Yokura was inside the barracks building, still alive. The desperate heroics of three of his men had saved his life, and now he was with his troops once more. There was no way of telling how badly he'd been wounded.

Three lives given for the life of their leader; only in a Japanese division would you see such sacrifice!

Linda's face was white.

"My God, Cliff," she said softly.

I shook my head in awe.

"You can call those little yellow devils almost anything, and they'll deserve most of it, but they aren't cowards."

There was a lull in the firing, such a pronounced lull that everything seemed so eerily silent you wanted to scream. The Mongols were holding off rather than waste their fire now, and the Jap troops were probably getting a backstiffening by Yokura—if he were still

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

alive.

There was an itchiness, an unpleasantness, to the silence.

"What do you suppose they're up to over there?" Linda said, and instinctively she whispered.

I shook my head.

"There isn't much they can do," I answered. "Moy's forces have the upper hand. The Japs must have lost half their division in that grenade assault by Moy's men. Perhaps Yokura will make a retreat. It's the smartest thing to do."

Suddenly, out of the silence, came a muffled, throbbing roar. It issued directly from behind the barracks building. It could come only from there. It was the roar of an automobile motor! And then I realized. Of course Yokura's division had one, or two, scout cars. Perhaps they were armored, perhaps not. But now I had an idea of what was up.

"Cliff," Linda said, "will they—"

"Yokura's probably been told of Tangla Khan and General Moy's flight to the side of the Nationals," I answered, thinking swiftly out loud. "Ten to one he plans to go after them, in a scout car, banking on the very good chance that he'll be able to overtake a party on horseback!"

I'D HARDLY spoken the last words when an increased throbbing from the car behind the barracks arose, and the snout of a gray-and-black open scouting car appeared around the building's edge.

They had a scout car, but it wasn't armored and was heading for suicide. For there was only one way to the gates of the village, and that lay in a direct path of fire through the courtyard. Yokura must have been insane. General Moy, Tangla Khan, and the rest of their mounted party had been able to make it through the courtyard because of the advantage they'd had in having machine gun fire to protect them from counter volleys by the Japs. But Yokura and his men didn't have a machine gun to cover their dash.

And not only did they lack this strategic necessity, but they were making their desperate escape through a hail of enemy machine gun fire—something else Moy's mounted dash hadn't had to face!

"God knows they aren't cowards," I exclaimed in awe.

And then the scout car—widely exposed to the Mongol fire—thundered out into the open courtyard, turned sharply, and started in the direction of the village gates.

I had only time to see that three Jap soldiers sat in the front of the car. Three more in the back, one of them in an officer's uniform—obviously Yokura.

Then the machine gun on the roof opened fire, followed by the volleying blasts from the riflemen before our building. It was red, gruesome carnage. They didn't have a chance.

The soldier behind the wheel got it after less than three seconds. The soldier next to him, as if he'd been expecting it, grabbed the wheel and carried on. He lasted two more seconds. Then the third soldier in the front climbed across the bodies of his dead comrades and seized the wheel. There was no effort from those in the back of the car to fire defensively.

The scout car slewed off to a lurching halt as the last of the front three soldiers—the one who'd taken over the wheel—caught a leaden hail of death from the machine gun.

The three in the back didn't have a chance. They leaped out to the ground, stumbling back to the safety of the barracks building. The one in

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the officer's uniform — I was positive now that he could be no one but Yokura—caught a bullet in the back from a rifleman and fell first, less than three feet from the abandoned scout car. The others didn't get much farther. They fell after five and ten yards respectively.

The Mongol riflemen were making up with a vengeance for having allowed Yokura to get across the courtyard the first time. This time they were prepared. This time they weren't missing.

I started to turn to Linda.

"It's suicide—" I began.

And suddenly there was another throbbing of a motor. But no hesitation this time—it had obviously been warmed up during the last few minutes deafening gunfire—as the snout of a second scout car turned past the edge of the barracks buildings and raced out into the courtyard.

MY FIRST supposition had been correct. They did have two scout cars. And now I could see that the first had been sacrificed as a ruse, a decoy, a shield. For it was being used as a shield as the second car kept in between it and the barracks building as it raced toward the gate.

There were Jap riflemen in the second car, in the back. And they poured a steady stream of fire at our building as their car raced onward.

The move had taken the Mongols by surprise. They hadn't expected another car, and they were baffled by the shield which had been placed between them and their new target.

But the machine gun on the roof opened fire. Then stopped in less than three seconds. One of the keen-eyed Jap riflemen in the rear of the scout car must have gotten the machine gunner. It gave them the precious time they needed. Then they were out of sight!

I thought of General Moy, of Tangla Khan, and of their four Mongol soldier companions. Obviously they were now pursued, and also quite obviously, they didn't know it. If the scout car overtook them I dreaded to finish the thought.

Linda had my arm. She must have been thinking the same thing. Her fingers gripped my wrist tightly.

"Cliff," she said excitedly, "They're going to overtake Tangla Khan, and Moy!"

I shook my head.

"They mustn't, Linda, they can't!"

Linda nodded.

"I know. That's what I was thinking. We aren't going to let them, Cliff."

I looked at her as if she'd gone mad.

"What are you talking about, Linda? There's nothing we can do. I wish to God there were, but what—"

Linda cut me off. She was pointing at the abandoned scout car in the center of the courtyard. The one that had been used as a shield.

"There's nothing wrong with that car, Cliff," Linda said.

For a moment I didn't get it. Then I looked at her incredulously.

"You're mad, Linda. I'd never let you risk anything as wildly insane as that!" I grabbed her by the shoulders.

"But, Cliff," Linda said grimly. "They'll stop Tangla Khan and Moy!"

I looked at the car again. I remembered the machine gun on the roof. It *could* provide a sheltering cover-fire. The car would probably still be unscathed where the motor was concerned.

"I'll go, Linda," I said suddenly, "but you'll stay here!"

Linda shook her head, and that stub-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

born set came into her jaw. It only took a glance at her to know that I was licked. And now that I'd determined to see it through there could be no waste of time.

"Damn your red hair," I grated. "Come on!"

I GRABBED her by the arm, and we went along the corridor to the far end. There was a spiral staircase there leading up to the roof. I had Linda wait at the foot of the staircase while I went above to make the arrangement with the machine gun crew on the roof. My Cantonese, fortunately, was intelligible enough to make them understand. They nodded.

Then I was down again, moving along the corridor with Linda. I collared a Mongol who'd stepped back into the corridor to replenish his ammunition supply. I made him understand what I wanted. He nodded.

We stood there waiting tensely while the Mongol went back to the line of riflemen and transmitted our requests. I'd had no doubt about getting their support. I wasn't disappointed. Six of the biggest, burliest Mongol warriors came clumping back into the corridor.

Then, once more, I made myself understood as best I could, making certain that they got everything.

The start of a steady volley of rifle fire from the remaining Mongols grouped around the front of the building, and the opening of machine gun chatter from the roof was our signal.

The six Mongols dashed out first, running swiftly ahead of us toward the car. I was beside Linda as we raced behind them.

"This time," I shouted to her, "*really* keep your head down!"

And then the Mongols ahead of us had taken places in the back of the car, and were opening fire on the barracks building. Two of them were dragging the three dead Japs from the front seat. I grabbed Linda, pushing her into the front and down to the floor. Then I edged in behind the wheel myself. The Mongols were clambering into the car and firing, now, and I was kicking the starter, praying to God that nothing was dead in that motor.

The motor coughed once, then stopped!

Time hung in hell during the next split seconds as I kicked that starter again and gave the gas pedal a pounding. My spine was frozen in premonitions of dread. Sweat soaked my forehead.

A Jap bullet crashed through the hood of the motor, up high. And then the motor coughed again. Coughed again—and caught! I'd had the car in gear and we lurched forward jerkingly. I was feeding the gas pedal as fast as I dared. All around us was the din of gunfire.

But we were moving. Seconds later we were roaring out of the courtyard, and seconds after that we were clear of the gunfire!

But now I had no time for relief. There was a job ahead. There was another scout car to catch. We roared out of the gates of the village of Khan. Then we were bouncing along a rutted road.

I looked down beside me. Linda was climbing up from the floor, rubbing her head. She grimaced at me.

"Fine thing to do to a lady," she shouted. "Knock-out stuff!"

"Hang on!" I shouted. We hit a hard rut and Linda grabbed for the side of the car.

"How many left?" I yelled a minute later.

Linda looked back.

"Four!" she shouted.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I felt slightly sick. Our little stunt had cost two human lives. But I was forgetting myself. I wasn't a doctor this time. There were other things to think of.

WE HIT a mud turn, going downhill, the rear tires of the scout car seemed unwilling to grab. They started spinning while the rear of the car tried to catapult us over. Then, thank God, the wheels caught and we were racing on again.

The muddy road was freshly soaked, and I could see the heavy prints of the tires of the scout car ahead of us. They were leaving a trail. I wondered if we'd catch them. I didn't want to think of the consequences if we failed.

There was more than lives at stake. China itself hung in the intricate balance of weights which Fate had now constructed.

"That wasn't Yokura who was killed in the first attempt!" Linda suddenly leaned over and shouted in my ear. "I saw the face of the dead man in the officer's uniform."

I nodded grimly. The moment the second scout car had made the dash I'd been certain that Yokura had placed a decoy officer in the first car. So Yokura wasn't out of the way. We'd be meeting him again—somewhere up ahead.

Most of the dash ahead of us lay downhill, due to the fact that the little village of Khan had been high on the mountain side. And it was some five minutes later, as we whipped along the thin ribbon of a roadway running along the sheer side of a cliff, that I caught my first glimpse of our quarry.

Linda pointed over the sheer side of the cliff, pointed downward. There was a perfect view of a broad expanse of barren countryside. A small roadway was visible, and along that roadway moved a swift cloud of dust.

Dawn was almost breaking and visibility was good. There was no doubting the significance of that moving cloud of dust. Yokura's scout car in pursuit of Moy and Tangla Khan!

Minutes flew by, five and then fifteen. The sky was getting lighter. I wondered if the Japanese forces pincering in around the deserted Nationals planned to attack at dawn.

We skirted a sharp turn between twin hillocks of boulders. And then, for the first time, we saw Yokura's car within firing distance!

It was less than half a mile ahead of us. Something must have happened, a wrong road, perhaps a minor breakdown, that stalled them.

I didn't say a word. I couldn't. My heart was thumping like a steam piston hammer. There was a weakness in the pit of my stomach, and my foot felt numb on the accelerator pedal.

We were on the road of a graduated plateau, and a sheer roadway of loose slag lay about a mile ahead. It couldn't have been more than ten yards wide. One side was a rocky wall of mountain; the other a sheer drop of more than a hundred yards.

Yokura's scout car was approaching this roadway now, and they were forced to slacken speed slightly. It gave us a chance. I jammed that accelerator until my foot hurt.

WE CAME into the first few yards of loose slag less than a quarter mile behind Yokura's car. Came into the stretch without lessening speed. The wheels whipped wildly, and it was all I could do to keep control of the car.

I didn't look to our left, for the sheer drop was there now. I hugged the rocky mountain wall as closely as I could, praying to my Maker that we'd hit no jarring boulders. Death waited if we did.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Yokura's car was still moving at three quarters of its former speed, the driver evidently fearful of the risks the narrow roadway offered. We were gaining on them with every second. Now we were but two hundred yards away.

They had seen our car, of course, but it wasn't until now that they opened fire. The first shots *zinged* harmlessly past us. The next were closer. We were still gaining.

A shot blazed over my shoulder, and I realized that our Mongol riflemen had risen in the back of the car and were now retaliating in the duel. One of the Jap riflemen ahead tumbled from the back of the car, bouncing like a stone, and pitched off the sheer side of the cliff road. Callously I thanked God that his body hadn't lain in the road to throw our car out of control when we hit it.

We were less than a hundred yards away. Their fire was still ineffective. I sensed that they were slowing down gradually, hoping to give their riflemen better aim. All they needed was one bullet through my skull and their worry from us would be over. They seemed to be banking their strategy on this.

I pulled my head down instinctively. Now I was barely peering over the hood of our car.

Suddenly we were rushing up on them. They'd halted—halted close to the mountain wall, hugging the side. And now, too late, I saw their desperate strategy. They'd waited until the momentum of my speed would prevent me from throwing the brakes. They'd waited until we were close enough so that there was no stopping a crash with them.

I cursed aloud. It was crash into the back of the scout car rushing up at us—or try to swing around the six or eight feet opening on the sheer drop side of the road!

If we hit them full on it was death. And it was almost certain death to try to swing around them. And there was no room to get through between their car and the mountain wall side of the road.

If I tried to swing the wheel now, tried to skirt that narrow thread of road on the cliff side, we'd undoubtedly go out of control. Jamming the brakes would throw us over the side just as certainly. The road bed was too loose to hold.

I'd taken my foot from the gas pedal the moment I'd realized their scheme. But we'd been hitting fifty-five, and it would be a long time slowing. We'd crash into their rear before we stopped. We'd crash while still doing close to forty.

"Get down and back!" I screamed to Linda.

And then I pointed the nose of our scout car directly at an angle between the car ahead and the side of the mountain wall. It was a desperate gamble. But it was all we had. In billiards they'd call it a bank cushion shot.

I tried not to brace myself for the crash. Tried to stay limp and still hang on. Linda was down against the seat. The scout car ahead seemed to fly up to us. There was a rending, terrible roar as we hit in between the car ahead and the wall on our right.

The last thing I remembered was cutting the ignition switch. . . .

SOMEONE was shouting my name. "Cliff, Cliff, honey, are you all right?"

I opened my eyes. It was Linda. My head was in her lap. Her forehead was deeply cut, and blood oozed slowly down her temple. She was sobbing.

I tried to rise on my left elbow. I couldn't. I was doctor enough to know that my left arm was broken. I took

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a deep breath. Internally I seemed to be all right. I moved my legs. Okay. I used my right arm and Linda's assistance to rise. Our scout car was a crumpled, twisted wreck.

"Your forehead," I told Linda, "you shouldn't try to—"

"It's all right, Cliff. Don't worry about me. Oh thank God you're all right, Cliff!" I held her close to me.

I could see the marks left by Yokura's scout car. They made a jagged, tearing trail to the side of the cliff. Down there, several hundred yards down, would be the wreckage of their car.

And then one of the Mongols who'd been in the back of our car walked over to the side of the cliff and looked down, grinning. His face was badly scraped and bleeding. His uniform was torn. Two of his fellows joined him. They were in the same shape. I knew then that they must have leaped from the back just as we'd hit Yokura's scout car. They'd taken quite a scratching from the slag road bed, but were otherwise apparently all right. And then I saw the fourth. He was coming up the road from about a hundred yards back. He'd evidently jumped sooner than the others.

I shook my head bewilderedly. We were still alive, and General Moy and the Princess Tangla Khan wouldn't be overtaken. I felt suddenly very weak. The Mongols had come over to Linda and me, now, and were still grinning in ghoulish glee.

I looked at them dizzily. Their faces seemed to spin around and around. Dawn had broken. There was a concerted growling rumbling in the distance. Rumbling like thunder.

"It isn't thunder," I said to Linda. "It isn't thunder."

"No, Cliff," Linda said, and her voice was soothing. "It isn't thunder."

"Cannon fire," I muttered thickly. Everything was whirling faster and faster now. "Dawn attack. Japs trying to choke off the road. The Burma Road. It isn't thunder."

Linda was saying something but I couldn't understand it.

"It isn't thunder," I insisted. "It's cannon fire, and the Nationals have Tangla Khan and General Moy to lead them."

And then the road was rushing up to hit me in the face. Things were spinning too crazily to try to keep up with them any more. I closed my eyes. The darkness was warm all around me . . .

WHEN I opened my eyes again there was warm sunlight on my face and a white pillow under my head. I was in a bed in a white room next to a large window. Someone held my hand. It was Linda Barret.

She was clean and sweet and fresh and wearing a white print dress. There was a small bandage on her forehead. She was smiling at me.

"Long sleep, eh, Cliff?" she said.

I opened my mouth to answer.

"Don't," Linda said swiftly. "You'll have plenty of time to talk later. This is my turn and I'm going to make the most of it." She paused. "You're in a hospital in Shanghai, Cliff. Doctor turned patient. A red cross unit sent by the Mongols who went to join Moy and Tangla Khan picked us up on the roadway. You've been out for quite a spell."

"But—" I began. My tongue was thick.

"Don't try to talk," Linda repeated.

I was wondering a million things. But Linda seemed to be answering them all. I nodded my head to indicate I'd keep still. It was nice to lie there and look at her.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"You've been talking too much while delirious as it is," Linda said. "Talking in front of nurses and doctors and saying the wildest most improbable things about Mongol warriors, and a General Moy, and a girl who was the daughter of Genghis Khan. They think you were a little daffy, Cliff."

I frowned indignantly.

"Now don't get sore, Cliff," Linda said. "That's what *they* think. The General Moy you described in your delirium is an ancient Chinese bandit hero, dead at least a hundred years."

"Linda," I blurted thickly, "you *know* that—"

"Uh, uh, Cliff," she cut me off again. "And Tangla Khan, known in Chinese history as the daughter of the Conqueror, has been dead considerably longer than that. And there's no finding any trace of the village of Khan on a map of the Tinchan sector mountains. It just doesn't exist."

I was beginning to get what she was driving at. *She* knew it had all happened, but unless we wanted to be tabbed as loonies it would be best not to argue. I nodded slowly.

"And the Nationals in the Tinchan sector broke the Jap effort to cut off the Burma Road. They were led by an unknown girl hero and a droop-moustached bandit leader who arrived in time to change a rout to a victory. Both the girl hero and the bandit leader were gone by the time the fight was over, and all China is wondering who they were." Linda had a half-smile on her face.

"General Wong disappeared also, but long before the battle. It is imagined that he was killed by a Jap patrol."

Linda was right, of course. I knew now that they'd think our story an opium hangover if we tried to tell it. But all the pieces fitted in too perfectly for me not to have been certain of what we saw. And I was certain, too, of more than that. I was certain that General Moy and Tangla Khan were reconnoitering in the village of Khan—even if it didn't exist—readying themselves for another such moment when China would need them.

So I nodded understandingly to Linda. She squeezed my hand.

"And is that all you want to know?" Linda asked softly. "Does that bring you up to date?"

I shook my head violently.

"Will you—" I began.

"Don't try to talk," Linda interrupted. "Yes, Cliff. Of course I will. Just as soon as you're strong enough to pick out the ring for me."

It isn't smart to question anything in China. I didn't question this . . .

ACCOUNTING
the profession that pays

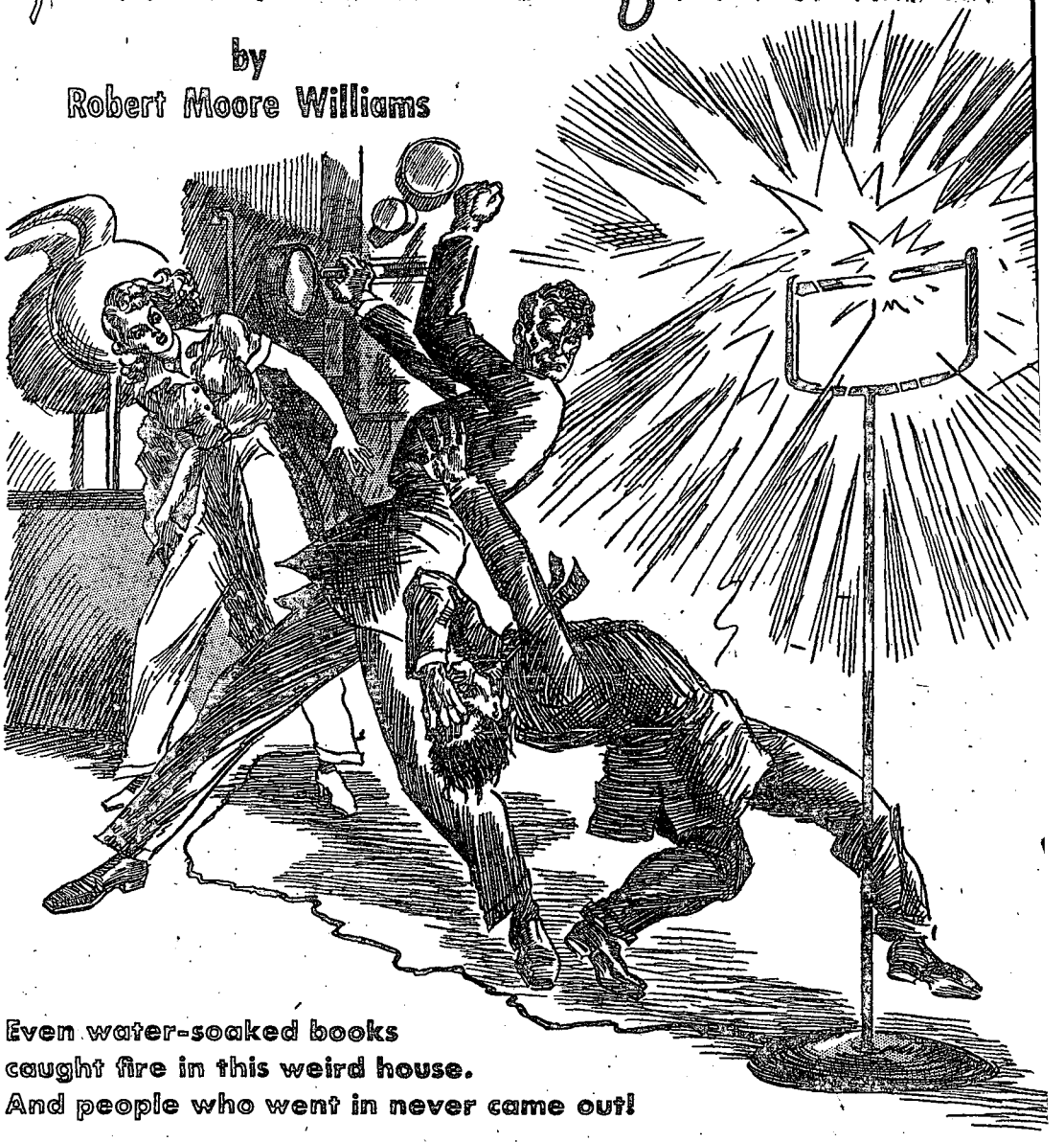
Accountants command good income. Thousands needed. About 20,000 Certified Public Accountants in U. S. Many earn $2,000 to $10,000. We train you thoroughly at home in your spare time for C. P. A. examinations or executive accounting positions. Previous bookkeeping knowledge unnecessary—we prepare you from ground up. Our training is personally given by staff of experienced C. P. A.'s. Low cost—easy terms. Write now for valuable 48-page book free, "Accounting, the Profession That Pays."

LASALLE EXTENSION UNIVERSITY
A CORRESPONDENCE INSTITUTION Dept. 1275-H, Chicago

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The HOUSE of FIRE

by
Robert Moore Williams



Even water-soaked books caught fire in this weird house. And people who went in never came out!

"BY GOLLY!" Rucker gasped. "The danged place is on fire!"

The house, constructed of stone, had been abandoned for years. It was now a crumbling pile of ruins. All night long rain had been falling, pouring in floods through the holes in the roof. It was now early in the morning and the rain had stopped, but moisture still oozed in droplets from the grimy walls. Pools of water were on the floor. The air was dank and clammy, chill with wetness.

In a rain-soaked stone house fire simply could not start accidentally. The place had never been wired for

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Rucker pulled the switch and hell broke loose!

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

electricity, no gas mains led to it. For a fire to start in this gloomy ruin was impossible.

But a fire had started here! Rucker had just entered the place. He had come up the stairs and was standing in what had once been a second floor bedroom. Across the room from him was a ramshackle overstuffed chair, left here when the last resident of this place had hastily quitted it years before. From the cushion of this chair smoke was spiraling upward.

The chair was directly under a hole in the roof. All night long rain had poured over the piece of furniture. It was water-soaked. But in spite of that, it was on fire.

"Hell's fire!" Rucker gasped. For twenty years he had been a self-appointed caretaker of this house, carrying a double-barreled shotgun as his badge of authority. He had the gun with him now. Setting it against the wall, he leaped across the room, jerked the cushion from the chair, threw it on the floor, stamped on it.

The fire went out reluctantly. Rucker stamped the last lingering flames into the floor. "Danged infernal combustion," he said to himself. He meant spontaneous combustion. The fire had started in this manner, he thought. This solution satisfied him.

Giving one last look at the remnants of the cushion to make certain the blaze was extinguished, he picked up the shotgun and walked into the adjoining room. Holes had been drilled in the stone walls of this room, planks ripped from the floor, then clumsily replaced. Lying on the floor was a pile of oak flooring. The planks were rotten and water-soaked.

They were also on fire.

From bulging eyes, Rucker stared at them. "It ain't possible!" he gasped. "Them danged planks wouldn't burn if you soaked 'em in coal oil and turned a blowtorch on 'em."

They *were* burning. Gray smoke was crawling toward a hole in the ceiling. He could hear the crackling of the flames eating at the rotten wood.

He leaped across the room, stamped at the fire, then, when that method of extinguishing the blaze failed, grabbed the planks and began throwing them out the window.

"What the hell is goin' on here?" he panted, when the planks were all out the window and the fire was safely extinguished. "By golly, it looks like—" He stopped, appalled.

Smoke was billowing from the room where he had discovered the first blaze.

"She's broke out again!" he shouted.

He rushed across the hall. The cushion from the chair had not caught on fire again, as he had first thought. There was a closet in the room. It was empty, he knew. But smoke was boiling out around the edges of the door, floods of smoke, greasy and black. It belched out into the room in rolling billows.

Rucker started toward the closet. The smoke poured around him, choked him, blinded him. Tears rolled down his face. He staggered to the window.

"Help!" he called. "Help!"

DOWN below him, fifty yards from the house, was a little river that widened here and there into deep pools, a favorite haunt of fishermen from the nearby town of Gainsville. Rucker had seen an early morning fisherman on the bank of the river when he entered the house. The man was still there.

"Hey, you!" Rucker yelled. "Help!"

The man heard him shout and looked up. He saw the smoke pouring out of the roof and started toward the house.

"The whole danged place is on fire!" Rucker shrilled. "Go get the fire department."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The fisherman didn't stop to ask questions. He took one look at the smoke boiling from the house, dropped his rod and reel, and started running up the river toward Gainsville. The amount of smoke told him that the fire was too far advanced to be extinguished without fire-fighting equipment. The nearest fire truck was in Gainsville, almost two miles away. He knew he didn't have time to go to Gainsville on foot and call the fire department.

He also knew that about a quarter of a mile up the river a girl was camped. She had a car and a trailer and had been camped in this spot about a month. He could send the girl after the fire department while he returned to the old stone house. He didn't in the least mind bursting in on the girl. In fact, he rather welcomed this opportunity to meet her. He was curious about her.

He was also curious about Rucker.

It was his job to be curious. The fisherman was Steve Flint, of the anti-sabotage division of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. He was curious about everything that happened in this vicinity, about everybody who lived here or visited here. Stretching along the opposite bank of the river was a high fence of barbed wire, the top wires heavily charged with electricity. The fence enclosed an area of thousands of acres. In that area the United States Government was manufacturing trinitro-toluol—TNT. Thousands of tons of this terrific explosive were stored within the region enclosed by the fence. A single spark, a tiny flame, in the wrong place, and this whole region would be literally blown off the map.

Remembering the terrible Black Tom explosion of the last war, and with the evidence of strange fires and explosions now taking place in vital areas, the government was taking no chance on an explosion in this new TNT plant.

Steve Flint was one of dozens of agents assigned to guard this area, and guard it well, with their lives, if need arose; to guard it secretly, working under cover, catching the would-be saboteur before he had a chance to get in his deadly work. That was why Flint was fishing here. He was watching the fence across the river, he was watching everything that happened in this vicinity.

The single word, "Fire!" from the lips of Rucker set a warning bell ringing in Steve Flint's mind.

CHAPTER II

The Fires Continue

THERE had been, Steve Flint knew, a great many strange fires in the United States during the preceding months.

But never in the history of the country had there been so strange a fire as the series of blazes that broke out in the old stone house this morning.

He found the girl in her trailer. She seemed greatly startled at his blunt statement that the old stone house was on fire, but she promptly went for the fire department, burning rubber off the tires of her car as she got away for Gainsville. Flint went back to the stone house to see if he could be of help. He found Rucker in a paroxysm of excitement.

"You the guy that was fishin'?" Rucker shouted. "Did you get the fire department? Hell's popped loose here for sure. Don't stand there gapin' at me. Grab a bucket and help me carry water from the river. The danged house is burnin' in more places than I can count. If she wasn't so danged wet from the rain last night she'd have been burned down by now."

Rucker had two buckets. He was

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

frantically rushing to the river, filling his buckets, rushing back to the house and emptying them on the blaze that seemed handiest. He was too excited to wait for Flint to answer him.

Fighting a fire was not part of Flint's job, but it was a neighborly thing to do, and he promptly pitched in and helped. He discovered he had his hands full. The first fire he put out was a small blaze burning right in the middle of what had once been the dining room floor. He doused it with water and it went out. Returning a few minutes later with more water, he discovered the same spot was on fire again. He emptied a bucket of water on it and the flames sputtered out.

Not five minutes later it was burning again.

The fire department truck, siren screaming and bells clanging, had arrived by then. The firemen run a hose to the creek and began pumping water. They discovered they had their hands full, too They ripped the wall out of the second floor closet, poured water, and put that conflagration out.

There was only one problem: as fast as they put out a fire in one spot, another blaze broke out in a different place, and by the time they had *that* one extinguished, the first spot was blazing again.

Before eight o'clock that morning a total of fourteen different fires had broken out in this house, all without any discernible cause. One minute a spot would give no indication of being on fire. The next minute tongues of flame would be licking up through roiling clouds of smoke. The harassed fire fighters would turn the hose on the blaze. It would go out. By that time another spot would be on fire.

SOME of the fires were exceedingly strange. Steve Flint picked up a book lying in a corner. It was an old book, water-soaked, it had been lying there for years. He opened it.

The book was on fire in the middle.

He threw it out the window.

There was a wooden block lying on the floor of a first floor room. It was about four inches square and was black and soggy. While he looked at it, he saw an intense point of light appear on its surface. It was no bigger than the head of a pin but it was intensely brilliant, as bright as the sun itself, so bright it hurt his eyes. Involuntarily he looked away.

When he looked back, the soggy block of wood was on fire.

Before his eyes, the block had caught fire.

He threw it in the river.

An old three-legged stool—apparently once a milking stool—seemed to explode into flame. A cursing fireman hurled it from the house.

Then old Johnny Rucker's shotgun, standing in a corner of the kitchen where he had placed it, let go with both barrels at once. The gun wasn't cocked. there was no one within ten feet of it when it exploded.

Fire had apparently simultaneously started in the shells in both barrels—

Fortunately no one was hurt by the discharging gun. The only result was to blow a hole in the ceiling of the kitchen. With the exception of Steve Flint everyone present was too frantic even to notice that the gun had been discharged. Flint noticed it. Cold chills crawled up his spine. If a gun could go off when no one was touching it—

"What—what on earth is causing these fires?" the girl gasped.

She had returned with the fire department. Her name, Flint had learned, was Loretta Blanton, and she had said she was a free-lance photographer engaged

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

in completing a series of nature studies, which accounted for her car and trailer and for the fact that she was camped beside the river—if her story was true. Clad in a pair of brown slacks and a sleeveless sweater, she was darned good looking, Flint was willing to admit. And in spite of the efforts of the firemen to keep her out, she had been constantly in the house, fighting fires with the best of them.

Or was she fighting fires? Was she perhaps observing the results of a series of blazes? Was she making notes on how effectively these fires started?

"I wish I knew what was causing them," Flint answered grimly. With terrible fascination he was watching a chair. Before his eyes, it puffed into smoke and then into flame!

"Oh!" Loretta Blanton gasped. "It's —it's supernatural, that chair catching on fire like that." Her voice was tense with fear, her face alive with terror.

Or was she only a clever actress, pretending to be afraid, pretending to be scared?

A CENTIPEDE with legs of ice was crawling up Flint's spine. He stared at the chair. The flame and the smoke were real. The blaze had started right before his eyes and he had been unable to determine how it started!

Were these fires really supernatural? Was some invisible angel of destruction present in this old abandoned house, going invisibly from room to room, applying a flaming torch, laughing at the antics those frantic humans who were trying to extinguish the blazes he caused?

"It's supernatural all right," he answered, flinging the chair out the window.

As inexplicably as they had begun, the fires stopped. They just ceased appearing. With apparent cause, the flames had appeared. With no observable reason, they stopped. The perspiring firemen extinguished the blazes, waited for more. They didn't appear.

By this time dozens of curious people had been attracted to the scene. They were drawn together in knots, whispering to each other. Flint saw a reporter and a photographer arrive in a speeding car. They started asking questions and taking pictures. Flint circulated from group to group, listening to their remarks.

"It might be static electricity," he heard someone mutter.

"Maybe some kind of gas is seepin' up through the ground," another hesitantly suggested.

These people were scared. They were staring wide-eyed at the house, talking in whispers as though they were afraid to speak aloud. Someone might overhear them unless they whispered. Or *something*—

They clustered together, seeking comfort in the presence of each other.

Flint took the fire chief aside. "What, in your opinion, caused these fires?" he demanded.

The fire chief stared suspiciously at him. "Who the devil are you?" he demanded.

Flint slid a hand in his pocket, brought out a tiny gold badge.

"Golly, son, I don't know," the chief gasped. His eyes went round with awe. Flint was the first FBI agent he had ever seen.

"You keep that under your hat," Flint said sternly. "Now, about these fires—"

"Golly, son, I don't know," the chief answered. His whole manner had changed now that he knew Flint's identity. He was eager to be of help. "I never saw anything like it. Thirty years I been fightin' fires but I never saw anything like I saw here this morning—"

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE words trickled off. This man was bewildered. He had seen something that was entirely outside his experience. He was afraid.

Flint asked him about static electricity and about a gas seepage.

"Nuts!" he said. "Static electricity might cause a spark and an explosion but it wouldn't cause fires like these. Gas neither. You can write static and gas off the books. And the house is not wired for electricity." The fire chief shook his head. There was something else on his mind but he hesitated before speaking, looked keenly at Flint.

"Go on," the agent encouraged him.

"It's this danged house."

"What about this house?"

"It's haunted," the chief said. Then he laughed uneasily. "No, I don't mean that. Or I guess I don't. But I've known about this house ever since I was a kid. Heard my folks talk about it. Built by a man by the name of Wilkinson, about 1890. He lived in it a couple of years and sold it for a third of what it cost to build. Claimed he heard voices in the place."

"Voices?" Flint echoed.

"That's what my folks said," the chief answered. "The man who bought it didn't give a dang for voices. He lived in it for about ten years—"

Again the voice trailed off. "What happened to him?" Flint prompted.

"Nobody knows," the fire chief answered. "He just disappeared and ain't been heard of since. The county sold it, years later, for taxes, and the man who bought it lived in it a couple of months, then gave it back to the county. It's been abandoned the last thirty years. Nobody but old Johnny Rucker will even go near it and he's cracked."

"What about this fellow Rucker?" Flint questioned. "Where did he come from and how long has he been here?"

"Oh, he's just a tramp. Nobody knows or cares where he came from. He's been here for years. He seems to have the idea that there's treasure buried around the place and he keeps tryin' to find it. You saw where he had torn up the floors and drilled holes in the walls. He ought to be in a mental hospital, probably, but he seems harmless, so we have just let him be. Saves the county the cost of his keep that way."

Flint digested this in silence. He was not superstitious, he did not believe in haunted houses. If he hadn't seen those fires start, he would have scoffed at the whole idea. But he had seen them. In spite of himself, his gaze strayed across the river.

In the distance he could barely see a humped concrete dome. Hundreds of tons of TNT were stored in that single shelter.

The fire chief followed the line of his gaze.

"Son, I don't know what started these fires," the fire chief said. "Maybe they were supernatural, maybe they just started themselves. Maybe they were started by radio, or something like that, by somebody—I don't know how they started but I know this much: it's a danged good thing they started here, instead of over there across the river."

He nodded grimly toward the concrete dome.

"You're telling me!" Flint answered.

ONE word was sticking in his mind. Radio. He was not entirely familiar with all the recent advances in radio but he knew it had been developed to the point where it would do marvelous things. One of the latest developments was the rhumbatron, by means of which a beam of high frequency radio waves could be concentrated in a small area. There were other advances, Flint knew.

Could these fires have been produced

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

by radio? Had sabotage of the TNT plant been attempted? Had the saboteurs missed connections and instead of blowing up the TNT plant, had they only succeeded in starting mysterious fires in an old stone house? If they missed their aim once, would they miss again?

"Thanks," Flint said to the fire chief.

"Okay, son," the old man answered. "Remember us folks down here is kind of depending on you boys to keep that—" He nodded across the river, "—from blowin' up. I got a boy workin' over there and a lot of other folks I know have got boys in that plant. If a fire should start over there—"

He didn't finish the sentence. He looked suddenly old, his face haggard with worry and fear.

"I know," said Flint grimly. Many other people were depending on that plant remaining in operation, intact. It was vital to the defense of the nation. If it blew up, not only would this old fire chief—and many others—lose sons, but the defense effort of the country would be seriously crippled. A good part of the explosive that would hold an enemy from American shores was being manufactured here.

The enemy would be willing to sacrifice many lives to blow up this plant.

If necessary, many lives would be sacrificed to keep it from blowing up, including the life of Steve Flint.

His first effort was to hunt up a telephone, make a long distance report to his superior. He had to repeat the story twice before the incredulous officer would believe it.

"Fire? A whole series of fires, starting from no apparent cause?"

"That's right," Flint answered. "Don't ask me how they started. I only know they did start." He repeated the incident of the book, the block of wood, the chair, and the exploding shotgun.

"Flint!" the voice at the other end of the wire was suddenly tense, the words clipped. "We're depending on you to ascertain the cause of those fires, at whatever cost! Get it? You find out what started those fires and report to me immediately. I don't need to tell you how serious this may be."

"Yes, sir." Flint answered.

"Another thing," the voice at the other end of the wire became cautious. "We have just received information that Shickel has been reported in that vicinity. We've already got a dragnet out for him. I am not prepared to say that he has any connection with these fires you have reported, but the fact remains that he is in that vicinity. If you run into him, hold him at all costs."

"Yes, sir," Flint answered.

"You know what he looks like."

"I certainly do!" Flint answered grimly. He had spent hours studying the photograph of Shickel. All other agents had done the same thing.

Shickel was the ace agent of sabotage of the enemy forces operating in America. The FBI wanted him, desperately. Where he turned up, fire and destruction followed close behind. He was wanted for a dozen different outrages and the FBI would be willing to pay his weight in gold for him. Or his weight in blood, if need be.

And Shickel was here! The thought was clamoring in Flint's mind as he hung up the phone!

Shickel was here!

Was Shickel also responsible for the fires in the old stone house?

CHAPTER III

Haunted

THERE was a full moon in the eastern sky when Steve Flint came back

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to the old house. He paused in the shadow of the trees beside the river and let his eyes run over the place. It looked ghostly. The moonlight flung shadows everywhere, half revealing, half concealing. In the pallid light, he could see the gaping holes in the roof, the gray stone walls, the broken windows leering outward like blind eyes. Like some beast out of a pagen mythology, the house crouched in the moonlight, and Flint had the impression that in some strange manner, it was alive, listening, waiting, watching—he shrugged away the fancy.

Yet the memory of the stories told him by the fire chief kept coming back. Voices had been heard in this house. The chief either had not known or had been unwilling to say what kind of voices had been heard or what they had said, if they said anything. Flint did not believe in voices. Echoes might account for them. But—men had refused to live here because of them. A spider with feet of ice went walking up his back. Involuntarily his right hand went inside his coat. The feel of the pistol in the shoulder holster was reassuring. He loosened the gun in the leather, made certain he could draw it instantly if need arose.

Why should he need a gun here in this deserted, abandoned pile of stone?

Because fires had started here. If this was sabotage, there was an excellent chance that the saboteur would come to observe the result of his work. Besides, Flint had been ordered to ascertain the cause of the fires and the fires had started here. Therefore he was here, watching, waiting. This was his post. Elsewhere other agents were watching and waiting.

Keeping out of sight in the shadows, he slipped into the house, entering through the kitchen. A ragged hole in the roof showed where Rucker's shotgun had been discharged. A cold wind blew over Flint as he looked at that hole in the roof.

He had a gun too. Supposing it should be discharged, all the cartridges letting go at once! Supposing a fire should start in his pistol—

He forced himself to ignore the thought. The agency that had discharged Rucker's gun was not operating now. Or was it? How could he tell when it was operating and when it wasn't?

Sweat gummed the palms of his hands. What had really happened here? Had the fires been misdirected sabotage or did they have another origin? Had they really been—supernatural?

If they were supernatural, then what went on silent feet through this gray stone pile?

Flint was tough-minded. The agents of the FBI could not be anything but tough-minded. He had a college degree. Experience had taught him that for every effect there was a cause. What had caused these fires?

Using a pencil flashlight sparingly, directing the beam always downward so as not to reveal his presence to anyone who might be watching on the outside, he went through the entire house, listening, watching—

The place was dank, miasmic. The odor of smoke clung to the wrecked rooms. Nothing moved here. The house was quiet. Again the impression came to Flint that the house was somehow alive and was watching, listening. His flesh crawled at the thought.

Somewhere downstairs a board creaked.

FLINT froze into immobility. A wind went sifting through the abandoned rooms, moaning softly. It rattled a shingle on the roof. Through the holes overhead the moon poured down a flood

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of beams. Flint listened.

The board did not creak again. He took a deep breath and was surprised to discover he had stopped breathing while he listened. The creaking board had meant nothing, he decided. Old houses were always subject to mysterious creaks and moans, especially at night.

Then—something rattled on the stairs.

There was no misunderstanding that sound. The stairs were littered with fallen plaster and debris. A piece of plaster had fallen from one of the treads to the floor of the hall below.

Someone had accidentally pushed that piece of plaster over the edge of the tread. Someone was coming up the stairs. Or *something*— He heard a tread creak softly.

Flint slid into the shadow, froze there at the head of the stairs. Silently he pulled his pistol from its holster, his gummy palms closed over the butt of the weapon.

He watched. On either side of the hall at the head of the stairs doors opened into rooms. Moonlight sprawled into those rooms but the hall itself was in darkness.

A shadow, blacker than the darkness, was slowly coming up the stairs. Flint watched it.

Was this his saboteur, coming to view the results of the blazes he had created? Or was this something else?

In the darkness, he couldn't tell. It might be a man. It might—God in heaven, where were his thoughts running!—not be a man, it might not be human.

It came slowly, cautiously picking its way up the debris-littered stairs, taking one step at a time, then pausing and listening. At the head of the stairs it stopped for a long time and seemed to be listening. Flint held his breath.

It came down the hall toward him.

He held the gun rigidly, the muzzle moving to cover the dark blob that moved through the shadows.

Had it seen him? Was it moving toward him, preparing to attack him? His finger tightened on the trigger. If it was a man, the gun would stop it.

But what if it wasn't a man!

In the darkness, he couldn't tell what it was. In the back of his mind was the memory of the sinister reputation of this house. What if this place was really haunted by some supernatural creature, some visitor from whatever other worlds there are? What if this dark shadow was some weird phantasm of the night? Would his gun be effective against that?

It turned into the door that led to the room at the right, stepped into the moonlight. Flint saw it clearly.

It wasn't a man.

It was Loretta Blanton! Still clad in a sweater and slacks, with a scarf tied around her head, the moonlight revealed her clearly. The girl photographer. Or the girl who pretended to be a photographer making a series of nature sketches.

FLINT was aware of a surge of relief. Frankly, he had been scared as he had never been scared before. He saw no need to apologize for his fear either, even to himself. The sinister reputation of this house, the incredible fires that he had seen himself, had roused in him deep, age-old fears of the unknown. Until he knew what was coming up the steps, he had every right to be scared of it. It might have been —anything. He wiped sweat from his forehead.

But—what was this girl doing here? If she was what she claimed to be, why should she come to this place, alone, in the dead of night?

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

There was only one answer. She wasn't what she pretended to be. That trailer of hers might contain a compact radio transmitter of a new and powerful design. The fires that had started here might have originated in that trailer! With grim pleasure Flint thought what that trailer would look like after the FBI got through tearing it apart.

Flint stepped to the doorway.

"Nice evening, Miss Blanton," he said.

The girl uttered a startled squeak and almost jumped out of her skin.

"Who—who are you?" she whispered. "What are you doing here?"

In the moonlight her face was as white as chalk.

"I'm the fisherman who sent you after the fire department this morning," Flint said.

"Oh—" She seemed a little relieved. "You frightened me." Angrily she stamped her foot. "What do you mean by sneaking up behind people like that and startling them?"

"Well, I'm damned!" Flint gasped, amazed. She was trying to take advantage of her sex, he thought. Well, she could try that for a long time without any results. "Turn around," he said, grimly.

She stared at him.

"I said to turn around," he repeated, iron in his voice.

"Why?" she demanded.

"Here's one good reason," he answered, exhibiting the pistol.

"Oh!" she gasped. Defiantly she faced him. "I won't turn around. What are you going to do?"

"All right," Flint answered. "If you won't turn around, I'll search you from the front. You mustn't mind, however, if I stick this gun half way through you while I am searching you."

"You—you're going to search me!"

"Of course."

"But you can't. I'm a woman—"

"Skip it, sis. You can be a mermaid for all I care. All I want is your gun."

"But I don't have a gun."

"Where I work," Flint answered, "we don't believe anything we're told until we verify it ourselves. Do you want to raise your hands and turn around or do you want me to stick this gun in your stomach and search you that way?"

"A BIG brave hero you are," she jeered. But as he moved toward her, she quickly raised her hands and turned around. Flint searched her thoroughly. The fact that she was a woman did not make any difference. In this game of counter-espionage, the female was often more deadly than the male, and the agent who took a chance with a woman was a sap from the word go.

Flint discovered she didn't have a gun.

"All right," she said. "I don't have a pistol. Does that satisfy you?"

"Frankly," Flint answered. "No." The absence of a weapon puzzled him. For a girl to come to this place without any means of protecting herself took courage. "What are you doing here?"

"None of your business. But if you must know, I lost my compact this morning and came to look for it."

"That's fast thinking," Flint answered. "But it doesn't help any. Sis, you're in a spot. You better talk up. What are you doing here?"

"I thought I mentioned before that that was none of your business," Loretta Blanton snapped. "For that matter, what are you doing here, Mr. Flint? What right have you to point a gun at me and search me? Are you engaging in highway robbery? If so, I don't have anything worth stealing."

Flint was stymied and he knew it.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He had no intention of admitting his identity but he also knew that there was no charge that he could make stick against the girl. The courts would demand evidence and he had none. He couldn't throw her in jail for merely being here. For all he knew, she might have come here to meet her lover. She was good enough looking to have plenty of lovers. Suspect her he certainly did but he had against her no evidence that would stand up in court.

He saw now why she didn't have a gun. If she had had one, he could have charged her with carrying concealed weapons. But as long as he had no evidence, she was as free as the air. He cursed beneath his breath. Spies were always taking advantage of the protection afforded by the laws they were trying to destroy.

"Well," she demanded, tapping her foot on the floor. "Are you going to rob me—or what?"

"I'm going to hold you," Flint answered. "On suspicion."

His words seemed to startle her. "You talk like you are an officer of the law."

"That, sis, is none of your business. I'm going to hold you on suspicion."

"Suspicion of what? Trespassing? This place has been abandoned for years. You couldn't make trespassing stick."

"Well, I guess I couldn't," Flint admitted. The girl had said too much. She had talked herself into a hole. "How do you happen to know this place had been deserted for years, when you've only been here a month?"

"Why—" She was momentarily confused. "I heard people talking. That's how I knew." She kicked at the rubbish. "And anyone with two eyes can see no one has lived here for years."

"I guess that's right," Flint answered vaguely. He really hadn't been listening to what the girl said. His whole attention was concentrated elsewhere.

OUT of the corner of his eyes, in a patch of moonlight at the edge of the river, he had seen something move. It moved again, resolved itself into the figure of a man, coming toward the house.

Another visitor! In a flash of intuition, Flint knew why the girl had come here. She was meeting someone. She had a date to meet some person here in this pile of stone. There was a possibility that she had a date to meet her lover here. Flint ruled out this possibility. No girl in her right mind would agree to meet her boy friend in such a place as this. That left—

It left the possibility that the agents of sabotage met here to exchange information and receive orders. If that were true, then the girl *was* a spy.

She followed his gaze. "What's wrong?" she whispered. "What do you see?"

A second later she was looking in the muzzle of Flint's gun. "Get over here in the shadow, Miss Blanton," Flint tersely ordered. "And if you make a sound, or attempt in any way to warn the person who is coming, I promise you faithfully you will spend the rest of your life in prison."

He was taking no chances. As they crouched in the shadows he could hear her breathing rapidly but she did not protest obeying his orders.

Flint heard the person enter the house, heard him moving around below. The floor in the room where they were waiting had been pried up in spots and the ceiling in the room below had fallen. Through the hole Flint caught a glimpse of the intruder. He was using a pencil flashlight and was making a careful examination of the room below.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Flint could hear him muttering to himself but he couldn't understand what he was saying. He caught a glimpse of the man picking up a piece of plank. He smelled it, muttered to himself, tossed it aside, got down on his hands and knees and sniffed along the floor.

A cold wind was blowing on Flint's back. A man who walked on his hands and knees sniffing along the floor! Was this intruder a madman?

Flint saw him tear a piece of rotten plank from the floor, sniff at it, then lick it with his tongue, meanwhile smacking his lips.

He was aware that the girl was watching too. In the darkness he could hear her breath coming in frightened pants.

The intruder poked around in the rooms below. Then, making no particular effort to be quiet, he came up the stairs. Flint heard him sniffing in the hall. The sound was like that of a huge dog snuffing along a trail.

Still on his hands and knees, Flint saw his head come around the edge of the door. Simultaneously two things happened. The intruder stood up. Loretta Blanton screamed.

As the man rose to his feet, his face was full in the light of the moon. Flint saw it clearly. And recognized it. The face was lean and saturnine. There was no mistaking it.

It was the face of Shickel! The intruder was the ace agent of sabotage of the enemy.

CHAPTER IV

The Vanishing Men

SHICKEL was here! This old stone house *was* a meeting place of the agents of sabotage. When Loretta Blanton screamed Shickel jumped. The sound apparently startled him. Then his hand streaked inside his coat. It came out holding a gun.

Flint could have shot him the instant he recognized the man. But—he didn't want to shoot this saboteur. He wanted this man alive. The FBI had questions they wanted to ask this man. Not that they expected Shickel to answer them willingly but in the hands of expert psychiatrists, using all the methods science has devised for extracting information from people who have every reason for concealing it, Shickel could be forced to reveal a great deal of what he knew. If possible, Shickel was to be captured alive. That was an order. The instant he recognized the intruder, the same second that Loretta Blanton screamed, Flint leaped. He saw the hand dive under the coat, saw the gun come out. He twisted his body in the air. Flame lanced past him from the muzzle of the gun. His own weapon, striking downward, struck Shickel across the back of his hand. Both guns clattered to the floor.

Flint's drive catapulted himself and Shickel across the room. Shickel was tall and lean and to look at him, one would get the impression that a puff of wind would blow him over. But he seemed to be made of whipcord and steel. Flint's fingers closed around the saboteur's throat. Instantly Shickel rolled over until he as face down. His back bent like a bow and Flint was flung over his head, his throat hold torn loose. Shickel dived at him.

Flint kicked upward with both feet. He barely had time to roll on his back and kick upward. His feet caught the diving man on the point of the jaw, knocked him to one side. He wasn't knocked out but he was groggy and dazed. Before he could get to his feet to renew the fight, Flint had retrieved his gun from the floor.

"Hands up!" he barked.

Dazedly Shickel raised his hands.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Flint backed across the room, got his back against the wall, jerked his flashlight from his pocket, flung its beam across the room. "Don't move!" he ordered. Shickel didn't try to move. He was sitting on the floor, hands over his head, his lips drawn back in a wolfish snarl.

Flint flung the flashlight over to the shadow where Loretta Blanton was crouched. The fight had lasted less than a minute. After she had screamed, she apparently hadn't moved but had remained crouched by the wall. Flint turned his flashlight on her.

She wasn't there.

The shadow was a shadow, nothing more.

Flint sprayed the light over the room.

The girl wasn't there.

THERE wasn't a place where she could be hiding. If she had darted from the room, Flint, even during the fight, would have caught a glimpse of her. She couldn't have gotten out of the place without him seeing her. But —she wasn't in the room.

"What the devil—" he gasped. What had happened to the girl? Had she jumped out of the window? Impossible. There was only one door and Flint was positive she hadn't gone through it. Then where had she gone?

"What the hell are you guys doing in here?" a voice said. It was a thick, raspy voice, and it came from the door.

In spite of himself Flint whirled. He gasped in relief when he saw who it was. Old Johnny Rucker! The self-appointed caretaker had put in an appearance. Rucker was harmless. For an instant Flint had feared that perhaps Shickel had had a partner. But it was only Rucker.

Then Rucker saw his pistol.

"Drop that gat!" he rasped.

Flint stared at him in shocked surprise. Rucker was in the shadow and he couldn't see him clearly. He didn't drop the pistol.

Instantly a beam of light lanced toward him. Above the beam of light he saw the twin muzzles of a shotgun and he realized what had happened. Rucker had attached a flashlight under his shotgun. When he turned the light on, its beam would enable him to see his target. The shotgun was centered unwaveringly on Steve Flint.

"Drop th' gat, I said," Rucker snapped.

Flint was burning with rage. This dim-witted fool might easily enable Shickel to slip out of his grasp. But faced with the twin barrels of that shotgun, he had no choice.

As he dropped the gun something seemed to tug gently at the cuff of his trousers.

He was looking at Rucker and didn't see what happened.

The gun didn't hit the floor.

Unconsciously he was waiting for the clatter of the pistol hitting the boards. When the sound didn't come, he looked down. The pistol was not in sight. Rucker's flashlight provided plenty of illumination to see the gun if it had been there.

It wasn't there.

He was aware that Rucker and Shickel were staring at him. "I said drop th' gat," Rucker said.

"I did drop it."

"Then where is it? I don't see it."

Flint was looking around him. He was more than bewildered, he was dazed. He knew he had released the pistol. He had felt it slide out of his fingers. But it didn't seem to reach the floor and it was nowhere in sight.

HE was aware that Rucker was staring at him suspiciously but he had

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

lowered the gun from his shoulder. Shickel had got to his feet. The enemy agent was unsteady, apparently still dazed from the effects of the blow he had taken. He wobbled like a drunken man. Then abruptly he quit wobbling. All the limberness went out of his knees. With the speed and the grace of a panther he leaped at Rucker.

The caretaker saw him coming and swung the gun around. Shickel was diving through the air toward his knees. He pulled both triggers at once. The gun exploded in a shattering roar. The flashlight attached to the barrels went out and Flint thought that the dicharge of the gun had probably destroyed the bulb. His eyes had been focused on the light and when it went out he was blinded for a moment. Then his eyes accommodated themselves to the moonlight pouring in a flood through the shattered roof.

Flint expected to see a corpse on the floor, the caretaker crouching over it. At such close range, the shotgun would have blown Shickel's head from his shoulders and there was small chance that Rucker might have missed.

But — there was no corpse on the floor. The moonlight would have revealed it if it had been there. It wasn't there. Nor was Rucker in sight.

The enemy agent and the caretaker could not have vanished more completely if the earth had opened and swallowed them. The only thing that met Flint's staring eyes was a thin wisp of smoke.

Smoke was all that remained. Smoke and the acrid tang of black powder. A spider with legs of ice went swiftly running up Flint's back.

It was—impossible. It was utterly beyond reason. But he had seen it happen. The house was silent, deserted. There wasn't a sound, except the vague whisper of the night wind blowing through the shattered windows. Again Flint had the impression that the house was waiting, watching, listening — All over his body Flint's skin was crawling. He was cold, cold—

First, the girl. Then his pistol, as he dropped it. Then Shickel and Rucker simultaneously—Now at last Flint was utterly convinced there was something wrong in this house. Something alien was here, something hideous, something monstrous.

For the first time in his life, his nerves betrayed him. A man, a dozen men, he would have faced. But this he could not face. He started to run.

Once outside the house, he would have regained control of his shattered nerves and would have returned. He would run once. Any man, even the bravest, will run once. A coward will keep on running, but a brave man will return to face the thing that has frightened him. Flint would have returned — after he got outside the house.

He didn't get outside of it. When he took his first hurried step something tugged at him. It seemed to pull at him, as a bar magnet pulls at an iron filing. If he had stopped! But he didn't, couldn't stop. He kept running. It tugged again on his second step, pulled harder at him. At his third step, it jerked him off his feet, jerked him into oblivion, into darkness.

One second he was starting to run. The next second he was gone.

Three men and one woman had entered the house. And had left it, but had not departed the same way they came. For a time they had disturbed the haunted silence of the crumbling pile of stone. Then they had gone

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

One moment the girl was in the deserted house, the next she was gone

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and the silence had come again.

Silently the house seemed to settle itself on its foundation, and again take up its ceaseless vigil, its eternal watching and waiting.

STEVE FLINT clawed his way back to consciousness. He was vaguely aware that someone was shaking him and calling his name. "Mr. Flint." It was a voice he knew, the voice of a girl. He managed to open his eyes. Loretta Blanton's anxious face was bending over him.

"Hello," he muttered. His mind was fogged. Abruptly it cleared and memory came flooding back. He remembered everything that had happened. He scrambled to his feet, stared with incredulous eyes around him.

He was in a strange, large room. With the exception of a round hole at the top it was windowless but enough light came in through this hole to enable him to see clearly. Three huge tripods were the only furnishings of the place. The tripods supported metal rods, the points of which came together like the electrodes of an electric arc. Blackened cables leading downward from the tripods vanished through holes in the floor. Cables, tripods, walls and ceiling, even the floor of this room, were blackened, charred.

Besides the girl, there were two men in the room. One of them was tall and cadaverous, impeccably dressed. The other was dressed like a scarecrow, in cast off odds and ends of clothing. Shickel and Rucker. Shickel was staring around the room, a look of intense preoccupation on his lean face. Rucker looked dazed and bewildered. He still had his shotgun but he seemed unaware that it was in his hands.

On the floor at Flint's feet was his pistol. Automatically he picked it up and thrust it into its holster. At the moment he accepted without question the fact that his pistol was here, that Shickel, Rucker, and Loretta Blanton were here, that he was here. He had not yet begun to ask where they were.

He was aware of a curious tension in the air. Strange pops and creaks came from nowhere. The room was tense, like a spring that has been tightly wound. But the pops and creaks gave him the impression that the tension was relaxing.

"Where—where are we?" Loretta Blanton quavered.

Flint looked at her. "Don't you know?" he said. It seemed logical to him to assume that she ought to know where she was. Somewhere in his mind was the thought that she and Shickel had brought him here. They were collaborating, he did not doubt. This place must be their secret hideout, he thought. His mind was not functioning as it should.

"I went to that stone house to investigate those fires," Shickel said, apparently to himself. "I find this!" He, too, seemed dazed.

"Sneakin' along like a dog, you was," Rucker said. "What was you sniffin' around about? No need to deny it. I saw you."

BLANKLY Shickel stared at the caretaker. It was obvious to Flint that the saboteur was estimating Rucker's intelligence. "Oh, that," he shrugged. "I guess I did look rather strange. I was merely smelling the wood to see if I could detect the odor of kerosene. I had the impression that perhaps the house had been soaked in kerosene and the fires were deliberately started." He shrugged again. "However, they didn't start that way."

Listening, Flint wondered if Shickel

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

were lying. Was it possible that Shickel, possibly reading the story in the papers, had come to the old stone house to ascertain the cause of the fires?

"You—you didn't have anything to do with starting those fires?" Flint demanded.

"Frankly, no," Shickel answered. "But I read about them and got curious. I wanted to know how they started. You understand," he grinned, "such information would be handy in my work."

Damned handy, Flint thought. To a man whose work was sabotage, the ability to start mysterious fires would be valuable. Shickel seemed very willing to admit his purpose. "You're under arrest," Flint said.

Shickel shrugged. "You seem dazed, my friend. If I seem willing to talk freely it is because I at least realize that the entire situation has changed radically since last we met. I would not have talked—*then*. Now," he swept his hand in a gesture that included the entire room, "my talking does not matter. All of us are in the same boat, and if I'm any good at guessing, the boat we're in may sink at any moment."

"Then this isn't your hideout?" Flint questioned.

"Not mine," Shickel answered. "And if you ask me whose it is, I wouldn't be able to answer, unless it, as I am beginning to suspect, belongs to the devil."

Flint's mind got back to the job then. Shickel was telling the truth, he realized. The saboteur had had nothing to do with the fires that had started in the old stone house. He had merely come there, as Flint had come there, to ascertain their cause. And something had tugged at him as something had tugged at Flint, bringing him here.

Bringing him *where?* The question was a roaring tumult in Flint's mind. Where were they? What had really happened? He saw Loretta Blanton's face. It was white with fear. She didn't know what had happened. She didn't know where they were. Rucker was walking around in circles, aimlessly staring at the walls, his face blank.

Where were they?

Creaking, a section of the wall was moved aside. A door opened, revealing a wall at least three feet thick. Built like a fortress, this room was. Light poured through the door that had opened, poured around the man who stood in the door.

It was a man, Flint saw with strange relief. The conviction had been growing on him that it wouldn't be. But the face that looked down at them was human. The man looked like a hermit. His face was bearded, his clothes were ragged and torn. Thin and scrawny, he looked as if he hadn't had a square meal in years. He stared down at them in stupefied surprise. They stared back at him in equal surprise—except Rucker.

The old caretaker brought his gun to his shoulder.

"Pete!" he snarled. "I've caught up with you at last."

THE bearded hermit looked surprised. His eyes narrowed at the sight of the gun.

"Ixnay, onnyjay," he said quickly. "Ixnay on the ungay. You got me ongray."

The caretaker blinked. Then slowly he lowered the gun.

"Who is this man?" Flint demanded.

"I don't know him," Rucker answered

"But you called him by name. You spoke to him. You must know him."

"I thought he was somebody else," the caretaker mumbled. "I don't know him at all."

Flint let it go. Rucker was lying and

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

he knew it but if Rucker wanted to pretend he didn't know this hermit, there was nothing Flint could do at the moment, except pretend to believe him. Flint knew Rucker was lying. Flint could understand pig-Latin. The hermit, answering Rucker, had spoken pig-Latin.

"Nix, Johnny," the man had said. "Nix on the gun. You got me wrong."

The man had come into the room. He was staring at them perplexedly. "So it got you, too," he said. "Just like it got me twenty years ago."

"What do you mean?" Flint demanded. "Who are you?"

"Martin," the man answered. "I'm P—Ed Martin. Twenty years ago I stopped in an old stone house outside Gainsville. And for twenty years I've been trying to get back to earth." He shook his head. "The same thing that happened to me must have happened to you."

"For twenty years you've been trying to get back to *earth!*" Flint echoed. "What the hell are you talking about. Aren't we on earth?"

Martin shook his head. "Nope," he answered. "I don't know the ins and outs of it but you're sure as hell not on earth. You're in another universe!"

Another universe! Flint gulped. Something had tugged at him. If what this hermit said was true, the tug had pulled him out of the world of earth, into another, totally different universe.

It wasn't, it couldn't, be true! The hermit was lying, had to be lying.

A SECOND later Flint knew the hermit wasn't lying. Through the still open door there came—a creature. Roughly it resembled the shape of the human body. The head was too large, the mouth and the nostrils too small. The body was the body of a sickly child, undernourished and weak. But unlike the body of any child who belonged on earth, it had four arms.

It was seated in a padded chair, the four arms resting on the four different button-covered switchboards. They were obviously switchboards. The chair was heavy, was cluttered with a complexity of bewildering apparatus. A low hum came from some source of power built into the device. The whole apparatus resembled an intricate, power wheel chair designed for the use of a cripple. But this chair had no wheels. It did not roll along the floor.

It floated through the air, floated as lightly and easily as a feather, obviously moving in response to the manipulations of the creature who rode in it.

A floating wheel chair that utterly defied gravity! No, Flint realized, they were not on earth. A device to defeat gravity had been dreamed of on earth but it had never been created. It was this floating chair, as much as the creature who rode in it, that convinced Flint they were really in another universe.

The hermit prostrated himself on the floor before the creature. He frantically waved at the others to do the same.

"This is Stargon," he whispered. "This is the boss."

Flint didn't obey. His hand leaped inside his coat, came out with the pistol. In his mind was the thought that with the gun he could force this creature to return him, and the others, to their own world.

The hermit almost fainted at the sight of the weapon. "Don't do that!" he hissed.

Flint centered the muzzle of the gun on Stargon. "You brought us here," he husked. "You've got to send us back—or else."

Stargon merely stared at him. No trace of emotion showed on the face. No fear. He merely gazed at Flint, much as a knight in armor might gaze at a

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

child threatening him with a toy sword. One set of fingers moved across a switchboard. Something tugged at Flint, tugged invisibly. The gun was jerked out of his fingers. Seemingly moving of its own will, it leaped high in the air, spun in a circle, then dropped down before the creature in the chair. He studied it for a moment. Slowly, held by some invisible beam of force, it revolved before his eyes. He finished his examination, and Flint had the impression that in the silent scrutiny he had not only determined the purpose of the weapon, and how it operated, but had probed the structure of the metal itself, down to the last molecule. His fingers played among the buttons under his four hands. The gun seemed to burst into flame. For a second, it hung in the air, glowing white. Then the solid blue metal seemed to melt and run. The cartridges in the weapon didn't explode. The powder in them flared in tiny puffs. Molten drops of metal fell to the floor, splashed like drops of water, and began to harden.

Flint gulped. In seconds, Stargon had taken the weapon from him, examined it, then destroyed it. Now Stargon was looking straight at him. He felt his flesh begin to crawl.

CHAPTER V

Another Universe

FOR a moment, while Flint's flesh crawled in sick fear, that awful, silent scrutiny continued. Then it ended. Stargon studied Shickel, then Rucker, then the girl. Stargon didn't seem much interested. His attitude seemed to indicate that these life forms standing before him were too low in the evolutionary scale to interest a creature of his intelligence. But he did deign to ask a few questions. Through Martin, who acted as interpreter, Flint explained about the old stone house and the mysterious fires that had appeared in it. Stargon showed a little interest then. He spoke rapidly to Martin.

"He says," the hermit translated, "that the old house must occupy the same position in your world that this laboratory does here. Stargon was running an experiment in here this morning." He gestured toward the tripods in the center of the room. "He set up a hell of a big electric arc, and generated thousands of degrees of heat. Stargon says the heat was so great it built up a kind of a strain in space. Some of the heat leaked through to earth, starting those fires."

The explanation seemed plausible. Flint readily grasped that a complete explanation would involve a knowledge of science far greater than he possessed. The important thing was that the fires had resulted from accident. They had started here but they hadn't been willful sabotage. Back on earth the TNT plant was safe. He felt a little better because of that.

"But how," he questioned, "were we brought here?"

"You weren't brought," again Ed Martin translated, with a quick look at Johnny Rucker, as though to make certain the caretaker understood. "Your coming was an accident. After the heat was generated here, the space in this room was still under a terrific strain. Stargon says space is like a spring. It can be stretched. If it's stretched too far, it breaks; but if it's not stretched too far, it pops back into place, a little at a time. You were in the old house when space was beginning to slip back into place. Stargon says that a sudden movement while this is happening may jerk you through space. Did you guys do a lot of jumping around, or something, just before you were jerked

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

through here?"

"Yes," Flint answered slowly. He remembered that Loretta Blanton had screamed. She had probably leaped to her feet and had vanished, one of those tugs coming just as she leaped to her feet. He had dropped his pistol, Shickel had been leaping at Rucker, and Flint had been starting to run. Just then the spring of space had slipped back a little and they had been catapulted into another universe.

"That's what happened to me," Martin said, again looking at Rucker. "They were working another experiment then, and I got caught. They've been using this lab for experiments for years and a lot of funny things have probably been happening on earth because Stargon has been experimenting here."

A LOT of funny things had been happening in the old stone house, Flint knew. It had served as a sounding board between two universes. And men, with the evidence of experiments taking place in another universe, before their eyes, had scoffed, calling the strange things that had happened, "Superstitious nonsense!"

Flint knew now that it had not been superstitious nonsense, knew it too late. There was little likelihood that he would ever get a chance to return to earth and try to tell a disbelieving world what he had seen. Ed Martin had said he had been here twenty years, trying to return all the time, but not succeeding. Unless they were luckier than Martin had been, they would spend the rest of their lives here, in an alien universe.

Well, it didn't much matter, Flint thought grimly. His job had been to discover the cause of the mysterious fires in the old stone house. He had succeeded. There was no danger of sabotage resulting from the fires. It was good to know that the enemy had not discovered some new means of creating destruction. Flint sighed with relief. He might have to send the rest of his life here, but his job was well done, at any rate.

It was at this moment that Shickel stepped forward from the little group. Bowing from the hips, he said to Stargon, "I should like to speak to your excellency in private."

Stargon stared at him.

"What do you want to speak to him about?" Martin demanded.

"That, too, I shall explain in private," the enemy agent suavely answered.

Martin translated for the benefit of the alien creature. Quite obviously he expected Stargon to refuse the request. But Stargon didn't refuse it. Oddly, he seemed intrigued by the thought that one of these humans could know something of sufficient importance to warrant revealing to him in private. He spoke to Martin.

"He says he'll talk to you!" Martin gasped, surprised. "He says for me to lock up you others."

"You're not lockin' me up," Rucker shrilled, gesturing with the shotgun. "I ain't gonna have it. You can tell the old goat in the wheel chair to go chase himself. I ain't being locked up."

"Ixnay," replied the hermit. "I'll ixitfay."

"You better," Rucker grumbled.

Martin herded Flint, Rucker, and Loretta Blanton out of the laboratory, down a hall, and into another smaller room. "I'll be back for you later," he said, looking at Rucker. "Stargon said I was to come and interpret for him."

A lock in the door clicked behind him as he went out.

"Well, here we are," Loretta Blanton sighed. The girl was pale but she

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

had regained her composure. Flint grinned wryly at her and she grinned back—and, of all things, began humming, "Show me the way to go home—"

"I don't imagine there is any way to go home," Flint said. There was a window high up on the wall. By stretching himself he could reach it. The transparent material that filled it was as heavy as bullet-proof glass. Escape was impossible that way. But if he couldn't get out, he could see out. Flint started at the scene before his eyes.

A CITY of low, flat-roofed houses stretched away into the distance. Somehow Flint had the impression that it was almost a deserted city, that once had housed a teeming population, but that the race which had once thronged here was now greatly reduced in numbers. Overhead a cloudless sky stretched away into lost infinities. In the sky was one of the floating chairs. It came sliding down on a long slant, landed easily on a flat roof nearby, went out of sight through an opening.

The door of their prison cell opened. Martin stood there. He was alone.

"Where's Shickel?" Flint asked.

Martin grinned. "He's with Stargon," he said. "He sold Stargon a bill of goods about a new experiment and Stargon is keen to try it out. They're already starting to work on it. Stargon is setting up the equipment and Shickel is showing him where."

The words had an ominous ring. Martin seemed to be both enjoying some secret joke and holding something back.

"What kind of an experiment are they trying?" Flint demanded.

Martin ignored him. He turned to Rucker. "Come on, Johnny," he said. "While that damned Stargon is busy, you and me will make a getaway. I've been working for years on a way to get back to earth, and I've got everything about finished." He leered at Flint and the girl. "We'll leave these two here to take my place."

Flint was already moving. The statement that Martin had devised a way to return to earth came as a complete surprise to him, but he had guessed, even before Martin made the statement, that the hermit had not planned to take him with them. There was only one thing he could do: force Martin to take him and Loretta Blanton back to earth. He could, and would, shake the gangling, ragged hermit into submission. He dived toward the man.

And found himself looking straight into the twin barrels of Rucker's shotgun.

"If you'd like a load of shot in your guts, just keep comin," Rucker said. There was no doubt that the caretaker meant what he said. Over the barrels of the gun, his eyes glinted dangerously. Flint jerked himself to a stop.

"But look here," he pled. "We're all in this together. You can't just go off and leave us here."

"Why can't we?"

"It's not—it's not human."

"To hell with that soft soap," Martin snarled. "You're getting no sympathy from me, you damned dick."

Whoever and whatever they were, they had recognized him as a detective. Flint was dumbfounded. How had he given himself away, he wondered.

"Flatfoot is written all over you," Martin jeered. "I knew the minute I saw you, you were a dick. I ain't seen one in twenty years, but I can still recognize a Johnny Law as far as I can see him. Come on, pal," he said

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to Rucker. "Keep 'em covered with that scattergun while we get out of here."

FACING the twin barrels of the gun, Flint had no choice except to submit. He knew Rucker would shoot if he tried to jump the man. Shickel had tried to jump Rucker, back there in the old stone house, and Rucker had promptly pulled the triggers of his gun. He would shoot now. Death was in his eyes. Flint stood very still. After all, whoever these men were, he was not greatly interested in them. Shickel was the important person.

"I thought you might like to know what Shickel and Stargon are doing," Martin said, holding the door open a crack. "This is it. Shickel has talked Stargon into setting up another one of those electric arcs, one that is big enough to crack space and let some heat seep over to earth. You know where they're setting it up? Over there about a quarter of a mile." He gestured toward the right. "Shickel says there is a TNT plant over there. He says it will be a wonderful experiment when some of that heat breaks out in the midst of all that TNT."

Martin slammed the door. The lock clicked shut.

The final words of the man were ringing in Flint's ears like the bells of doom. He had thought he had discovered that the mysterious fires in the old stone house meant no danger to the plant he was guarding. They had been accidental.

But they could be purposeful. He did not in the least doubt that equipment could be set up so that mysterious fires would appear in the middle of the underground storage chambers, with thousands of tons of TNT ready to blow up.

The explosion would be cataclysmic. It would result in catastrophe.

And it could be engineered from here, from another universe. It could be started in a manner against which there was no way of guarding.

If one explosion could be started from here, others could be set off also. Given a little time, the entire strength of a nation could be destroyed.

Flint had thought that Shickel could cause no trouble here. Instead the enemy saboteur was in the one spot where he could cause untold destruction!

"God!" Flint whispered. "I've got to stop that man."

"You mean we've got to stop him," he heard a voice say. It was Loretta Blanton who had spoken. Flint stared at her in amazement. She had quietly listened to the entire conversation. "But I thought—I was afraid you were working with him."

"Not on your life," the girl answered. "I had a purpose in being in that old house all right, but it wasn't to help Shickel. I don't know that I will be of any help to you, Mr. Fisherman Detective, but I'm willing to try."

"You may be able to help me," Flint answered. "By lending me a hair pin, if you have one."

"A hair pin?" Her hands went to her hair, removed a pin, which she handed to him. "Here. But I don't see what good it will do—"

"It may not do any good," Flint answered. "We will have to try and find out. But I need a hair pin, or something similar to one, if I am to pick this lock."

HE was already kneeling beside the door, studying the mechanism of the lock. Sweat began to bead his face as he worked the tiny piece of metal through the mechanism. As part of

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

his training he had made a rather exhaustive study of lock mechanisms. But this lock had not been designed on earth. Would his earth knowledge enable him to pick it?

Inside the lock something clicked. The door swung open.

"You worked it!" Loretta Blanton gasped. Then, as she saw what as beyond the door, her gasp of admiration turned to a cry of fear.

Still kneeling, Flint looked up. His impression was that he had not succeeded in opening the lock. This impression was instantly confirmed.

In the hall outside, two feet above the floor, the chair of Stargon floated. Stargon was in it.

Shivering in front of it, apparently in abject fear of their lives, were Martin and Rucker. It was Martin who had opened the door, at the bidding of Stargon.

"Well, I'm damned!" Flint gasped. "I thought that you—"

"Ixnay," Martin quickly interrupted. "We got oughtkay."

It was obvious that they had been caught. But Stargon was supposed to be busy. Why had he come looking for them?

"Great Stargon desires us to help him in his experiment," Martin continued. "He also commands that you two help him. Come on," he ordered peremptorily. "That is," he ended, "if you wish to continue living."

Looking at the emotionless face of the creature in the chair, Flint knew that this order had better be obeyed. Stargon would tolerate no arguments. He got to his feet. The girl beside him, he walked out into the hall. As he walked past them, he heard Martin whisper, "We're in this together, pal. If we work together we may find a chance to make a break. Is that okay with you?"

Flint nodded. Even though Martin and Rucker had betrayed him once, in the face of the menace of Stargon, they would only declare a state of neutrality, and work together.

But even working together, what chance did they have against the creature that rode in the floating chair? At the flick of a finger across the buttons on the panels under his four hands, he could blast them out of existence.

CHAPTER VI

The New Experiment

THE apparatus necessary for Stargon's new experiment was being installed in a low, rambling building located, Flint instantly saw, in the heart of the TNT plant. Somewhere across the warp of space, in another universe, men were at work manufacturing an explosive. They didn't know, those working men, that a spark would soon appear there, a jutting flame sufficiently intense to burn water-soaked wood. They would not know it had happened, even after the spark had appeared. They would never know *what* had happened. The explosion would come too quickly and be too violent.

Shickel, consulting a map he had drawn apparently from memory, was locating the exact spot where he wanted the electric arc. He looked up as Stargon herded them into the room. "Your people are certainly going to be surprised," he said, laughing, "when their nice new plant blows itself to hell and gone. I wouldn't doubt," he continued, "but that this single blow will win the war. By the time your people get a new plant built, we will have such overwhelming superiority that resistance will be useless. It will be a pleasure to watch your sprawling, clumsy democracy crumble under its own

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

weight."

"You haven't won yet," Flint answered.

"No, but we will. There's nothing you can do to prevent it."

"There may be," Flint said. He was desperately turning over wild plans in his mind. The only chance he saw lay in appealing to Stargon. After all the creature in the floating chair had no reason to create untold destruction in a world that had never harmed him and his kind. Flint turned to Martin, urged him to try to dissuade Stargon from his purpose.

"There's not a chance," Martin answered. "I know Stargon. I've been his personal slave for twenty years. To him, we're just curious insects under his feet." He shook his head. "If you knew these buzzards like I do, you wouldn't ask. There ain't many of them, they're practically immortal, and they're so damned intelligent that they're bored all the time. The only thing that interests them is some new idea. Now that Stargon has a chance to set off an explosion in another world, he'll do it just to see what will happen. If he kills a lot of people doing it, that won't matter to him. In fact, he'll like it. It will give him something new to think about."

Flint heard the words with sinking heart. He recognized what Stargon was—a bored sadist, a mentality that gets pleasure out of inflicting pain on other people. An appeal to such a person was so much wasted breath.

STARGON promptly put them to work. They carried metal, to be used in erecting the tripod that supported the arc, they brought in power lines, set up a master switch to control the supply of current leading to the arc. Stargon did almost no work himself. But he was an efficient overseer. Lightnings lurked in the char in which he rode. At the first sign of faltering, the lightning flashed. The fact that Loretta Blanton was not as strong as the men made no difference. When she faltered under a heavier load than she could carry, a whip-like spark leaped out from the chair. She screamed at the pain. Flint clinched his teeth. There was nothing he could do. Against the power of Stargon, he was helpless.

The arc was set up, the main switch installed, current was flowing and ready.

"Stargon says it will take about half an hour for the heat to warp space sufficiently for a flame to appear on earth," Shickel said to Flint. "That leaves you thirty minutes to do something."

"You go to hell," Flint said.

Stargon spoke. "Stargon says for you to adjust the electrodes of the arc," Martin interpreted.

Flint went to obey. He knew enough about the operation of an electric arc to know that the electrodes had to be adjusted just so or the arc would not operate properly. They were cool to the touch now, but soon they would be hot. When the current came, the heat of a miniature sun would flame here. The electrodes would drip flaming metal to the floor. Flint adjusted them. Glancing toward the others, he saw that Stargon had his hand on the switch that fed current to the arc. Stargon was impatiently waiting for him to finish his task.

"It would be like that devil to turn the juice on before I get out of here," Flint thought. He knew what would happen then. Surging currents of electricity would crisp his body in less than seconds.

"The boss says for you to hurry up," Martin called.

Then, for the first time, Flint saw a chance. A chance not only to pre-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

vent the destruction the operation of this arc would cause but also a chance to escape from this world! His heart leaped. It was a slim chance, but it was his only hope. He didn't have to guess what would happen if he failed.

He couldn't fail, he mustn't fail.

ALL over his body cold sweat popped out. But he didn't hesitate. Deliberately he began to stall.

"Hurry up," Martin called again, peremptorily.

"The electrodes are stuck," Flint answered. "I can't adjust them properly."

Stargon's hand impatiently moved toward the switch. Flint's heart stopped beating. His bare hands were on the metal where the searing current would come. If Stargon closed that switch—

"I'm doing the best I can," Flint called out. "I just don't know how these things operate. They're not like any electrodes I am familiar with."

He was lying. The adjustment was very simple. All he had to do was turn a hand screw.

"The threads on the screw are jammed," he shouted. "I'll have to have a wrench to adjust them."

Would his idea work? It had to work. There was no second chance.

Out of the corner of his eyes he saw Stargon take his hand off the switch. The chair sped through the air coming toward him. Stargon was coming to show him how to adjust the arc.

"The screw is stuck," Flint said, pointing toward one of the adjusting screws.

Impatiently Stargon motioned him out of the way. Reaching into a receptacle on the chair, he produced a wrench. Flint stepped aside. Stargon applied the wrench to the offending screw.

Flint moved unobtrusively but quickly. Not toward Stargon, away from him. Toward the switch that fed current to these electrodes. He saw Stargon apply the wrench to screw, turn it. It turned easily, too easily. Stargon looked up.

In that split second Stargon realized he had been tricked. His hands darted with lightning swiftness over the buttons on the panels of his chair.

Flint slammed home the switch.

CURRENT hummed as it raced through the cables, it roared as it reached the electrodes of the arc, splintered in a flashing crash as the arc flamed.

Stargon was trying to move the chair away, trying desperately. He knew what was going to happen. The chair lurched as he pressed the controls.

He was a split second slow. Flame from the arc struck him, washed over him, bathed him in a hellish radiance. That arc was a thousands times more deadly than an electric chair. Incredible currents flowed to it, through it.

Stargon was not caught in the full intensity of the arc. It would have killed him instantly. But he was caught in the fringes of that ball of blasting radiation. Flame washed over him. He screamed, jabbing with burning fingers at the controls of his chair.

The chair lurched upward. It was out of control. It spun in a circle. Stargon fell out of it, crashed headlong on the floor. His oversized head burst like a rotten egg.

Simultaneously Flint did two things. He cut off the arc. He didn't want that hellish flame to build up the intensity needed to warp space. Therefore he cut the arc. With the same motion he slugged Shickel under the ear. If a house had fallen on him, Shickel would not have been more flattened. He was out, cold.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

There was a moment of tense silence.

"Holy cats!" Martin said in an awed whisper. "Stargon burned with his own juice—Come on, let's get out of here." He and Rucker started toward the exit.

"Just a minute," Flint snapped.

"What you want now?" Martin demanded, staring at him.

"I want this arc dismantled," Flint said. "I don't want one of Stargon's friends to wander in here and discover what happened and decide to turn the arc on to avenge Stargon."

"You needn't worry about the others." Martin answered. "They all hated Stargon's guts. Anyhow if one of them gets bumped off, all the others do is cheer. They all hate each other."

"Nevertheless," Flint insisted. "The arc must be dismantled."

Rucker and Martin looked as if they would like to resist, but Rucker no longer had his shotgun—Stargon had apparently accounted for that—and they had no choice except to obey. The arc was speedily dismantled, the equipment scattered.

"Now we'll go," Flint said. He swung Shickel over his shoulder. The enemy agent was still unconscious but quite definitely Flint did not want to leave him here. No! Shickel was going back to earth. Martin and Rucker led the way toward the device Martin had constructed to enable him to return to earth. Flint and Loretta Blanton brought up the rear. The girl seemed dazed, unable to realize what had happened. Nor could Flint quite realize that they had won. The odds against them had been tremendous. He had almost given up hope. But they had won! The thought was singing in his mind. They had won!

MARTIN led them to a small room adjoining the laboratory in which they had originally appeared. A heavy steel door with a pane of heavy glass in it barred their way. "It's in here," Martin explained, unlocking the door.

"Are you sure it will take us back to earth?" Flint questioned.

"I think it will," Martin answered. "I managed to steal one of their chairs and made a lot of changes in it. I admit I had some help in fixing it up. One of the boys who didn't like Stargon was trying to do him dirt by helping his personal slave make a getaway, showed me what to do to the chair so it would warp space and let us slip through. It'll work all right. I'm sure of that. Get in there, Johnny," he said to Rucker, opening the door.

Rucker slid through. Martin quickly followed him. Flint started through.

The door was slammed in his face!

"To hell with you, you damned dick!" he heard Martin snarl from the other side of the door. "If you think we're taking you back with us, you've got another think coming. You can stay here until you rot."

Through the heavy glass Flint could see Martin thumbing his nose at him.

"Why, damn you!" Flint roared. He kicked at the door. The blow did not even rattle the hinges.

He stared into the appalled eyes of Loretta Blanton.

They had been marooned in an alien universe.

"If I ever get my hands on those two b——" Flint grated. Through the heavy glass he could see the two men. They had grabbed a canvas sack from one corner of the room and were lugging it to the chair, which, identical to the one Stargon had used, was apparently the one that Martin planned to use to return to earth. Flint scarcely noticed the canvas sack. He dropped Shickel, made a hasty search of the adjoining rooms. Within three minutes he had what he wanted, a heavy steel bar.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

With it he began smashing the glass in the door. Inside the room he could see Martin and Rucker. They were both inside the chair and Martin was clumsily manipulating the controls.

The glass was apparently shatterproof. Certainly it was tougher than any glass had a right to be. Flint sent the end of the bar crashing against it. The glass splintered. It began to crack. He hit it again and again. It shattered.

Flint reached through and lifted the bar on the other side of the door. The door opened. He dived into the room.

He was just in time to see the chair and its two occupants swirl into nothingness. That was the way they went —into nothingness. The area surrounding the chair seemed to blur before his eyes. Then the chair and its two occupants vanished.

Flint groaned. He looked at the girl. "We're licked," he said.

THEY were licked. Martin had spent years, and then had had to have the help of one of the inhabitants of this world, to adapt the chair so it would transport him back to earth. Years! "We may be here forever," Flint said. He made no attempt to conceal the truth from himself or from the girl. "I'm sorry," he said. "I should have known better than to trust them."

"It's not your fault," she answered. "Look!" she screamed.

Flint whirled. The chair was coming back. Martin and Rucker were coming back. As Flint stared, he saw the odd blurring of light. There was a hum of power. He caught a glimpse of Martin desperately fingering the control buttons. The air around the chair seemed to writhe, to twist and gyrate, blurring, oddly unreal. Then the blurring ceased. Solid and firm, the chair stood before him.

Its two occupants were quarreling. "Why in the hell didn't you tell me the place was surrounded by cops?" Martin shrilled at Rucker.

"How in the hell did I know there was any cops waitin' for us?" Rucker snarled back.

"So that's why you came back here!" Flint gasped. Rucker and Martin had returned to earth, and had run straight into an armful of officers. Very promptly they had returned here. Flint hefted the bar of metal. "Well, you're going back to earth again," he gritted. "And I sincerely hope both of you try to resist so I will have a chance to use this bar on your heads."

"See what you did, you damned fool!" Rucker shrilled. "You talk too much."

"Listen, mister," Martin whined to Flint. "Give us another chance—"

"The only chance I want," Flint answered grimly, "is a chance to break your heads!"

IN THE old stone house outside Gainsville, it was a surprised and startled group of FBI agents who answered the shrill whistle coming from one of the upstairs rooms of the crumbling pile of stone. They were here because one of them had trailed Shickel here. They thought he was still here and had surrounded the house to capture him. With flashlights and drawn pistols, they rushed into the room where the whistle had sounded.

"Come on in, boys," Steve Flint greeted them. "We've made quite a haul here tonight. First on the list," he shoved Shickel toward them, "one sabotage expert. Second on the list," he nodded toward Loretta Blanton, "one girl, who may be a free lance photographer and may be something else, but who is certainly worth investigating, whatever she is. Third on the list," he gestured grimly toward Martin and

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Rucker, "two gents who look like scarecrows. I don't know what they are either, but we can probably persuade them to talk—"

"I know what they are," Loretta Blanton spoke.

"What are they?" Flint asked.

"Bank robbers," the girl answered. "About twenty years ago the bank of Gainsville was burglarized, the vault blown, and thousands of dollars in gold and securities taken. The robbers were never caught, until now. These are the men."

" 'Tain't so," Martin shouted.

"You ain't got nothing on us," Rucker insisted.

"Open that sack," the girl said. "We'll see whether we have anything on you."

The sack was quickly opened. Out from it poured a flood of twenty dollar gold pieces, old-fashioned large size bills, yellow bonds, stocks, securities.

"My father was the cashier of that bank," the pale girl continued. "He was accused of complicity in the crime and was sentenced to prison. While he was in prison, he learned from another convict the identity of the persons who had actually committed the crime and that the two bank robbers had planned to hide out here in this old stone house. Years later, when he was released from prison he attempted to verify his information. He found one of the men all right—the self-appointed caretaker of this place, Rucker. But the other man had vanished and so had the loot. Rucker was apparently hunting for the money himself. In order to clear himself, my father had to find the loot. He died before he ever found it, and I took up the search for it, in order to clear his name."

HER story was easily verified. What had happened was simple. The two burglars had planned to hide out in the stone house, abandoned even then. Rucker had gone outside, leaving Martin and the loot in the house. When Rucker returned, his comrade and the loot were both gone. To Rucker that could have only one meaning—that Martin had hid the loot and double-crossed him, intending to return later for the money. For twenty years Rucker had hunted for the wealth all the time awaiting the return of his double-crossing partner.

"Well I'll be forever damned," an awed FBI man said. "Shickel, two bank robbers—I'll say it was a nice haul, Flint. You'll get a promotion for the night's work. About the girl, though, I don't guess she will need investigation."

"The heck she doesn't!" Flint exploded. "She needs investigating more than anyone I know. And she is going to get it," he continued firmly. "I'm going to attend to it personally."

Later, he did just that. But the results of his investigation he kept strictly to himself. There were some things, he felt, that he didn't need to report to the headquarters of the FBI.

THE CHAIR THAT had brought them back to earth went to Washington. There experts are taking it apart, prying into its secrets, trying to discover what makes it work. Obviously it contains some method of nullifying the effect of gravity. The experts want that secret, want it badly. They will get it too, in time.

The old stone house is still abandoned. No one cares to live there. No more voices are heard there, no more mysterious fires break out. It is quietly crumbling to pieces, haunted no longer.

COMING NEXT MONTH
"DOORWAY TO HELL"

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Romance of the Elements - Germanium

GERMANIUM is number 32 in the International Table of Atomic Weights. Its symbol is Ge and its atomic weight is 72.60. Germanium is a greyish-white metal of crystalline structure, so brittle that it cannot be drilled. It has a specific gravity of 5.35/20° C, melts at 958.5° C, and is not volatile at 1250° C. Used in crown glass, it increases the refractive index. It has been suggested as of value in the treatment of anaemia. It belongs to the tin and lead family of metals.

(NEXT MONTH—The Romance of Gold)

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

SPOOK

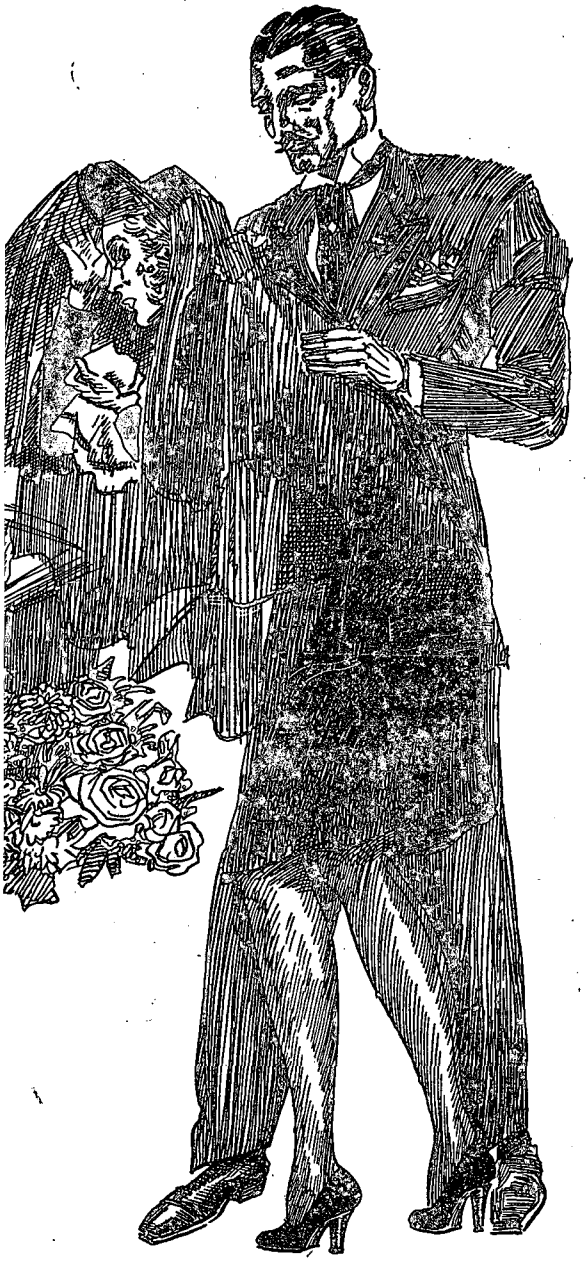
BY DAVID WRIGHT O'BRIEN

I sat down on the coffin to listen to the sermon

Being a spook isn't such a cinch as you might think! There are a lot of angles. How would you make a phone call? Or flip a taxi? Or save your girl from marrying a fortune-hunter?

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

for YOURSELF



"YOU'LL hurry back as soon as possible, won't you, Ronnie?" Jo asked me at the airport that morning. They were warming up my little sports monoplane, and I stood in the warm sun with my arm around her, looking down at the wonderful things the sunlight did to that rust colored hair of hers.

"You know it, hon," I answered. "I'll be back with bells and baubles. Even the moon if you want it."

She grinned up at me, and her nose wrinkled in that elfin way. "I don't want that," she laughed. "But you will bring me something, won't you?" She put a slim finger to her pretty chin in mock contemplation. "How about four leaf clovers?" she decided. "Hundreds of them, for luck."

It was my turn to grin.

"Pick out something hard," I challenged.

"That'll be enough," she said. "But don't forget, hundreds of them."

"For luck," I promised. "For the luckiest, most wonderful marriage in the world the moment I get back." I saw the sports plane was ready, so I took her in my arms and said goodbye.

Minutes later, behind the controls of the ship, I looked down and saw a tiny red-headed girl waving a white handkerchief. Then the earth below resolved itself into an orderly cross-quilt of roads and farmland, and I was on my way.

Two hours away from the airport, I was still thinking about Jo and what a wonderful bride she would make on my return. I hadn't been paying much attention to the instrument panel, and so

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

when the motor started coughing, and the foot pedals grew sticky and hard to manage I was naturally startled.

I didn't have much more time to be startled, for in the next two minutes I found the ship out of control, the motor acting ragged, and the nasty problem of a sudden air pocket throwing me wing-down.

Thiry seconds later and I was fighting a terrific downward spin while the wind screamed through the vents of the cockpit cowling!

The spinning cross patches of earth rushed sickeningly toward me, growing larger and larger. There was no time for sweat or fear as I fought those controls to straighten the ship out of it. You can't bail out in the middle of a spin. Closer—all I could think of now was Jo.

There was a blinding, vast, incredibly engulfing roar—then blackness!

I STOOD there about a hundred yards away from the crumpled, burning mass that was the little sports monoplane, watching the smoke curl upward from the twisted wreckage.

I was scared stiff and my hands were shaking as I fished for a cigarette and lighted it. It was incredibly miraculous that I was unscathed—totally uninjured by the crash. I kept thinking of this and wondering how I'd gotten out of the wreckage, for the first realization I'd had was standing off from the plane watching it burn.

Sirens wailed—I'd crashed in a farm plot near a highway—and minutes later men were running across from the road, piling out of an ambulance, and dashing toward the wreckage.

They paid no attention to me—ran right by, in fact—and began working on the blaze with chemical extinguishers, while some of them worked dangerously in and out of the wreckage, searching for bodies.

It was then, of course, that I snapped out of my dazed stupidity and dashed over to the men with the extinguishers.

"Hey," I yelled. "Let it burn. There's no one in there. I'm the pilot, and I got out unharmed!"

I was less than five yards from one of the ambulance men with the extinguishers. He didn't even turn.

Now I grabbed him by the shoulder, hard.

"Hey," I yelled again. "It's all right. There's no one in there!"

And at that instant, two things hit me with stunning force. First, the chap acted as if he still didn't hear me. And second, from the corner of my eye, I saw three fellows dragging a body from the cockpit. *My body!*

IT IS hard to get accustomed to the fact that you are dead. It is even more difficult to adjust yourself to the inevitable conclusion that you are a ghost.

These mental callisthenics—unpleasant though they were—were what I had to go through as I watched the ambulance people roar off down the highway with my body some fifteen minutes later.

I ran around like a chicken—or a ghost—with my head cut off during the time that they put out the blaze and carted my corpse off from the scene. I yelled. I howled. I protested. But, of course, no one paid the slightest attention to me.

They couldn't see me. They couldn't hear me. Even though I could hear and see myself and them quite clearly. At last I gave it up, and contented myself with glumly seeing the blaze put out and my body taken away.

Then I stood there on the highway, watching the cars flash past—some of them stopped to view the crash scene—

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and ruminating on the nasty position I was now in.

Oddly enough, I felt no sorrow for myself. Maybe that was due to the fact that, to myself, I was still myself. If you see what I mean. I still had cigarettes in the pocket of my sport jacket. I had a wallet in the opposite pocket. I could stand up, sit down, move around. Everything was pretty much the same to me—aside from being invisible and inaudible—but not to the world I'd left.

All things considered, my mental adjustment was proceeding at an incredible speed. And now, unhappily, I had room to think of Jo. Her face had been in my mind just before the crash. But now it was there even more strongly. For it had suddenly occurred to me that this would put an end to our plans.

Beautiful young ladies didn't marry ghosts. Or as far as I knew, they didn't.

But oddly enough, there was no maudlin sense of mourning in my soul at this realization. I felt an irritating frustration, of course. But this business of being dead, of finding yourself a ghost, wasn't the morbidly terrifying thing it is supposed to be. I felt—except for that sense of irritated frustration about Jo—pretty darned fine. I can't explain it, of course. You have to try things like that for yourself.

And even where Jo was concerned, I was suddenly determined to find some way to make the best of that. After all, I was a ghost, and ghosts are supposed to have supernatural powers and all that sort of thing. I decided to see what I could do about things.

The ambulance had roared off down the highway to the right, and so I stepped out close to the traffic lanes, and pointing my thumb in that direction, tried to hitch a lift.

If I hadn't been run over by a twelve ton truck, some five minutes later, I might have gone on trying to shag a lift indefinitely, unaware that no one could see me. But as I said, the truck thundered down at me, and before I could leap to one side, tore right into me—but *through* me!

This experience left me shaken but grateful. For if I hadn't been a ghost I most certainly would have been killed!

I CROSSED over to where a car was parked on the edge of the pavement. Its occupants were returning, chattering goulishly, from an inspection of my demolished monoplane. I climbed into the back seat and sat down just before they did.

A fat woman, with a plumed hat and gray hair, was one of the group. She was talking as they climbed into the car.

"It's horrible," she declared, shuddering. "That poor fellow never had a chance!"

She sat down on—or *through*—my lap. It wasn't uncomfortable, for in my status there was plenty of room for everyone, and I evidently didn't take up any space that they could use.

A middle-aged man, also fat, was driving the car. There was a younger fellow in the front with him, and a young woman and a baby in the back with the gray-haired old doll and myself.

Pretty soon we were rolling along in the same direction that the ambulance had taken. From their conversation I learned that it was Steuberberg, a fairly large town.

I smoked all the way, wondering vaguely what I'd do when I ran out of ghost cigarettes, and listening to their morbid chatter about my crack-up. It began to pall on me, and after a while I turned my attention to the scenery whipping by.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

When we arrived in Steuberberg, I climbed out at the first gas station stop they made. There, checking the telephone book, I got a list of the hospitals in the community. Then I tore it up, for I recalled that I was more than a hospital case.

At a newstand, the first one I came to after leaving the gas station, I saw a headline.

"RONNIE SAYERS KILLED IN PLANE CRASH HERE!" it said.

That was satisfying. Even the people in Steuberberg knew who I was, or had heard vaguely about my being a prominent sportsman pilot. I felt a slight glow of personal pride, and followed a man for a block and a half while I read the news account over his shoulder. It was an irritating way to read a paper. But I found out what I wanted.

My body was being taken back to Brock City for burial on Friday. This was Wednesday. That gave me all of two days to get back there. Plenty of time. Even for a ghost. That's what I thought.

For the rest of the day, and straight through the following day and night, I had a maddening time trying to work my way back to Brock City. I hitchhiked, of course, because my first ride had been so successful that way. But I ran into snarls I hadn't expected.

Human hitchhikers had one advantage over ghost thumbers that I didn't realize till then. The human hitchhiker—who could make himself heard—was easily able to find out the destination of his driver. I was not so fortunate, and on at least six occasions was taken miles off my course by unexpected detours of the persons with whom I rode.

And on each occasion I was obliged to wait a chance to get out of the car at a gas station stop or thru highway sign. It was all very irritating.

Then of course there were the two occasions in which I was forced to leave the automobiles of my unwitting benefactors because of the intrusion I felt I made on their privacy. In each case, my pilots were a young, amorously inclined couple. And in each case I felt acutely embarrassed. Those things happen to ghosts, you know.

On Friday morning, however, I at last arrived in Brock City. And promptly at ten o'clock on said morning, I sat on the edge of the pulpit in Saint Peter's Church, watching the crowds fill the pews for the beginning of my funeral.

UP IN the loft, the organist was giving out with majestically mournful rendition of the Funeral March, and up the middle of the church, escorted by cutaway-clad pallbearers, came my casket!

I could see the side-front pews. They were filled with a number of weeping, aged women. I couldn't recall ever having seen them before in my life. And I say life without meaning a pun.

A small, clerically garbed, white-haired minister stood at the front railing in the church, looking sad and righteous as the procession moved slowly along to the strains of the majestic organ.

I could see the faces of the pallbearers now. There was Wiffy Skene, my handball partner from the City Club. Wiffy looked very sad, and I could understand this inasmuch as we were to have played in the finals of the doubles championship four days hence. Behind Wiffy, also guiding the casket along with solemn sorrow, was big, blond Brad Noddinger. It was hard to understand why Brad looked so sad. He'd owed me over a thousand dollars in poker debts. He wouldn't have to pay them now.

The other pallbearers, of course, were

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

also quite familiar to me. Some were good eggs, others—two at any rate—I thoroughly despised.

Then there was a small, mourning-clad group following the pallbearers. Most of their heads were bent, but I could make out the identities well enough.

Jo, of course, was the first to attract my attention. There was a momentary sharp, aching tug at my heart when she raised her head for an instant. She wore a black veil, and her face was white and determined beneath it. I wanted to run down the aisle, to put my arm around her and say, "Look, honey. Everything's going to be all right. Give me a smile, huh?"

She held her uncle's arm. He was a white-haired, red-faced old boy. Not a bad fellow. He looked sorrowful, and I couldn't tell if it was because of me, or merely due to the strain Jo was under.

On the other side of Jo, guiding her along, was a tall, black-haired, sharp-nosed chap named Duane Pearson. Pearson was a fraud, a phony, a louse. In short, I'd never liked him. He cheated at golf and snarled at his caddies. He was looking for a fortune to stick his paws to.

I had always suspected that he had a fondness for Jo.

Even though I'd like to have climbed from my pulpit perch and punched him on the nose, I stayed where I was. Gentlemen don't make scenes at their own funerals.

THE casket was finally at the front of the church, and the mourners were seated in their pews. If I do say so, I'd packed the house in this last performance. I felt a pardonable rush of pride at this realization.

Suddenly I had to move over slightly in my perch on the edge of the pulpit, for the white-haired little minister was marching up the stairs to deliver his eulogy.

After looking up and down the packed church for a few hesitant moments, the little minister cleared his throat. Someone in the pews coughed. Far in the back of the church, a baby whined slightly.

"Friends," the little minister said solomnly, and I was amazed at the deep, rich power of his voice. "Friends, we are gathered here today on what, for all of us, is an especially sad occasion."

With no thought of being disrespectful, I pulled out a cigarette, lighted it, and settled back to enjoy myself.

"We all knew and loved Ronald Sayers," he declared.

"You might have loved me, but you never knew me," I retorted. But of course he didn't hear.

The old women in the side pews—the ones I'd never seen before—snuffled audibly at this.

"His passing," the minister went on, "has left naught but hollow emptiness in the bossoms of each and every one of us."

"Get on with it," I said, and again, of course, wasn't heard.

"Death is a dreadful thing," the minister observed.

"You're wrong about that," I challenged. *"It isn't at all bad."*

Of course the minister went right on.

"It strikes unexpectedly, swiftly, and finally. But it is the end to which we all must go sooner or later."

This was getting a little boring. Too many vague generalities. I stirred restlessly. So did a number of others in the pews.

The minister struck out on a new tack. I suspect that he sensed his audience slipping away.

"Ronald Sayers was a fine, clean, upstanding young man," he declared. And

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

there was a challenging note in his voice I didn't like.

"No one who had any contact with him failed to love him," the little old man continued.

"Bosh," I snorted. He was painting me as wishy-washy.

"His works of charity, kindness, mercy, and love were known to all."

"At least the last named," I agreed.

"Ronald Sayers is not survived by any living relatives," said the minister. I thought of my drunken Uncle Pete, who was pensioned off in Tahiti, and who would be in as soon as he heard the news of my death, both paws grabbing for what was left.

"But there are many of us to whom Ronald was more than kin, more than a brother, more than a father," the minister asserted.

"Please," I protested. *"Leave that stuff to Washington."* I was beginning to feel a slight irritation that this windy master of vague generalities had been selected to preach my funeral sermon. I got up from my perch and silently slipped down the stairs while his voice droned on.

VAULTING the railing, I stepped over to my casket and climbed comfortably atop, curling my arms around my knees. Now I could concentrate on gazing at Jo, who was less than ten feet away. I'd lost interest in the sermon by now.

Jo was bearing up well. Stiff upper lip and all that. This pleased me, for I knew she had courage, and the very genuineness of her white-faced restraint was stronger than a thousand tears.

I felt badly about not being able to tell her, of course. But there was still nothing I could do about things until I became thoroughly familiar with the powers and privileges of my new status as a ghost.

It was exceptionally irking, on the other hand, to watch Duane Pearson sitting beside her and patting her hand in solicitous understanding. Pearson and I had never gotten along well, although Jo had never been aware of this.

He had a small moustache beneath his sharp, long nose, and now and then he brushed it like a self conscious cat, looking out of the corner of his eye to see if people noticed how fine he was being about it all.

I wished then that ghosts could throttle people like they do in books. I'd have gladly choked Pearson into unconsciousness. But of course my gaze returned to Jo. And in my mind I tried to tell her things.

Maybe my mental wireless had some results, for I seemed to notice a strange change occurring in her. She was still white-faced, but the unhappiness in her eyes was replaced by a sort of hidden understanding. As though she heard me, and knew how I'd want her to feel. The time must have raced by, as I sat there atop my casket drinking in the loveliness of her. Time had always done that in the past when I looked at Jo.

But at any rate, before I was aware of it, the services were over and the pallbearers were leaving the pews and grouping around the casket while the organ picked up its funeral dirge once more.

I climbed off the casket and waited until Jo and the group of immediate mourners fell in behind it as they began to move out of the church. I walked along, then, right behind Jo, still sending out those mental telepathic messages. And they seemed to be going over better than ever, for I saw her little shoulders square, and her chin went up.

Pearson still marched beside Jo, and had I been able to, I'd have planted a

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ghostly kick on the seat of his well-tailored morning coat.

I STOOD at the top of the steps outside the church, undecided, watching them put the casket in the hearse, and looking a bit wistfully after Jo and the others as they climbed into the long black mourner's limousines.

And it was then that they grabbed my arm.

When I say "they", I mean two other ghosts!

And when I say "grabbed my arm", I mean just that, for they were forcibly restraining me there on the top of the church steps!

They almost scared me to deat—, I mean out of my wits. One was a tall, heavy, red-faced fellow with a jovial air and twinkling eyes. The other was a little man, pinch-faced, skinny, yet somehow instantly likable. How did I know they were ghosts? Well they grabbed my arm, for one thing, and for another, the big fellow boomed.

"Hello, Brother Ronnie, welcome to our city!"

Somehow my wits returned.

"Who, what, ho—" I began.

The big, fat, jovial, red-faced ghost grinned.

"A bit of a surprise, eh?" His voice was a boom. "Never occurred to you that there were other ghosts trooping around beside yourself, eh?"

"Yeah," said the skinny little pinch-faced ghost, "it never occurs to any of us."

"Nice funeral you've just had," the big ghost complimented.

"Thanks," I answered. "But look," my gaze flew down to the black limousine moving away from the curb after the hearse, the limousine in which Jo was riding, "I've got some things to attend to. If you two will look me up some other time I'm sure we can compare some interesting notes, and—"

"The rest of the funeral will get along by itself," the big ghost boomed. "My name is Manners. Brother Manners, if you wish."

"I'm glad to meet you, Brother Manners," I answered, trying to get my arm loose. "But you see—"

Brother Manners didn't release his firm grasp on my arm. "And the ghost to your left," he went on, "is Brother Bead. I know you'll be anxious to meet the rest of the boys."

"Look," I demanded frantically, "it's all very nice realizing I won't be lonely in my new life. But if we could put this off till some other time I'd—"

"Sorry," boomed Brother Manners firmly, "but this is as far as you're allowed to go."

"ALLOWED to go?" I was properly frantically indignant.

"By the Royal Order of Brothers of the Shroud," big Brother Manners answered cheerfully. "Section two, article five. No ghost is allowed to follow his funeral procession further than the church services. It might be too depressing."

"Royal Order of Brothers of the Shroud?" I felt as if I were losing my mind.

"The International Ghost Union," Brother Bead piped up squeakily. "We're president and vice president of Local Nine, here in Brock City."

I could see that the hearse, followed by the long automobile procession, was now at least four blocks away.

"But you don't understand," I pleaded. "My girl, my fiancee, is in that procession. I want to be with her. I want to be able—"

"Plenty of time for that," Brother Manners boomed with sympathetic, but firm, understanding.

"Yes, plenty of time for that,"

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Brother Bead squeaked in echo. They both still kept unyielding grips on my arms. I watched the last cars of the automobile procession turn a corner six blocks down.

"All right," I said resignedly. "What must I do now?"

"That's better," boomed Brother Manners heartily.

"Much better," piped Brother Bead.

"We'll just jump into a car," said Brother Manners, "and whip over to the lodge meeting. It's going on now. The brothers will all be glad to see you. We haven't had a famous member in our chapter for quite some time."

They led me down the steps, still holding onto my arms. A car was moving at a fair amount of speed past the church. Before I knew it, Brothers Manners and Bead had whipped me out into the street, and still holding me, had leaped onto the running board of the machine!

Brother Bead saw the expression on my face.

"Don't let it scare you," he said. "It's easy. There are lots of tricks you'll get to learn in a short while." And with that, they pushed me *through* the side of the car and into the back seat!

There were two people in the back of the car, and one person—a girl—driving in the front. We sat down *on* the two in the back seat, and Brother Manners pulled a package of cigarettes from his pocket.

"Have one?" he offered.

I reached over past the nose of the middle-aged man on whose lap I was sitting, and said, "Thanks."

We sat there, then, smoking and talking as the car rolled along.

"We might have picked a larger car," Brother Manners apologized with a wave of his hand. "But we're in a bit of a hurry."

"What's this all going to be about?" I asked. "I mean, this lodge business?"

"It's simple, Brother Ronnie," Brother Bead piped up. "You've got to meet the brothers before joining the association. Sort of a formal introduction, y'know."

"I don't mean to be rude," I told them, "but supposing I don't care to join?"

Brother Manners laughed in booming heartiness.

Brother Bead chuckled squeakily.

"You have to join," Brother Manners explained.

"All ghosts have to," Brother Bead added. "If they want to amount to anything."

"What good does it do me?" I insisted.

"You'll learn the tricks of your trade. You'll learn to spook for yourself, so to speak," Brother Manners explained. "We can teach you a lot. We can show you that we've got a pretty swell organization, and that this new life is finer than any other—especially the one you've just left."

"Somehow," I answered, "I feel already as if it is."

Brother Bead nodded.

"You get that hunch immediately. I know I did."

"HOW many members do you have?" I asked curiously.

"As many," Brother Manners waved his hand vaguely, "as there are good eggs who've died."

"You said good eggs," I replied. "What do you mean by that?"

"Not everyone who dies gets to be a ghost," Brother Bead piped up proudly. "Oh my no, not everybody."

"Well, well," I said, feeling as if it was all I could say, "that's something to be proud of, eh?"

"You bet it is," Brother Manners

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

boomed. "Only people who die violent deaths, and who've learned to live well, and who are good eggs, can be ghosts."

"Well that does limit it a bit, I imagine," I told him.

"Yes," said Brother Bead, squeakily. "And you have to die under a certain age to be eligible."

"Fifty," said Brother Manners. "You have to be under fifty, in addition to the other requirements."

"I'm learning a lot already," I declared. "People have such silly ideas about ghosts in life, don't they?"

"They're superstitious," Brother Bead piped in reedy scorn.

The car in which we were riding was whipping along at a great rate of speed now, somewhere around fifty miles an hour. Looking out the window I could see we were still in the city, but traveling along a wide stretch of super boulevard.

"You'll find our lodge exceptionally mutually beneficial," Brother Bead declared. "I don't know what I'd have done without it. I tell you, when I died I didn't know a soul. Wasn't on speaking acquaintance with a single ghost."

Brother Manners nodded.

"We taught Brother Bead lots of things he'll never regret learning." He suddenly looked out the window. There was the Brock City municipal stadium a half a block away. "There we are," Brother Manners boomed heartily. "Might as well get ready to step out."

"You mean that's your lodge headquarters?" I gasped.

Brother Bead nodded.

"Certainly. It's very seldom in use more than once a week by humans. We try to arrange our meetings not to conflict with the regular schedules in the stadium."

"Although once or twice," amended Brothers Manners, "we've had to hold emergency meetings while prizefights and rodeos were going on."

I could only gasp. And just in time, too, for in the next instant we were passing the municipal stadium and brothers Manners and Bead were whipping me *through* the side and out of the car onto the street.

"Thanks," Brother Manners boomed after the car, bowing politely.

I was still shaken by the apparently effortless manner in which we alighted from the swiftly moving car. No jar. No jolt. I remember regretfully the countless miles I allowed myself to be carried out of the way, just a few hours back, in hitchhiking to Brock City. And at any time, it was now apparent, I could have stepped out of the car when my drivers turned off on side highways. I chuckled.

"What's so funny, Brother Ronnie?" Brother Bead asked.

I told him.

Brother Manners and Brother Bead laughed heartily at this.

"You see what we mean?" Brother Manners said. "You've a lot to learn before you can spook for yourself. All sorts of tricks."

"Heh-heh-heh," Brother Bead shrilled. "Think of it, waiting for a gas station before daring to get out!" This seemed to tickle him.

"Well," said Brother Manners, removing his paw from my arm, "we might as well get started."

THE three of us moved up to the sidewalk and headed for the huge front doors of the municipal stadium. There was a big sign on the front of the door, reading "LODGE MEETING TONIGHT. PROMINENT SPOOKERS TO BE HEARD!"

I stopped aghast.

"That sign," I choked.

"Yes?" Brother Manners said casu-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ally. "What about it?"

"Can't live people see it?" I demanded.

Brother Manners chuckled heartily.

"Of course not. It's a ghost sign. You'll learn about them."

Of course we walked right through the doors of the municipal stadium. It was very hard for me to get used to this neat trick of ghostery. But what we encountered just inside the doors was even worse. Three tall ghosts, wearing long gray shrouds, faces hidden by voluminous cowls, greeted us!

I stepped back, startled.

Brother Bead chuckled squeakily.

"Don't be afraid, Brother Ronnie," he said. "These are brothers. They're just wearing the lodge uniforms."

Silently, the three new "brothers" handed us three shroud-cowl outfits. And by watching brothers Manners and Bead I was able to don my costume over my street clothes without any particular trouble. I could hear a babble of voices coming from inside the stadium proper. Evidently the meeting was in full session.

It was, and I saw as much immediately upon stepping through the last doors and into the vast stadium hall. Almost all the main floor chairs of the stadium were occupied by hooded gray figures. And I saw that they were grouped around a prize ring—there was evidently going to be a fight the following night—and enthusiastically raising hell.

Brother Manners touched my arm reassuringly.

"There they are," he said proudly. "A fine group, a great gang."

I noticed then, for the first time, that some of the "brothers" carried large placards—the kind you see at political conventions—bearing various legends.

MORE PAY AND SHORTER SHROUDS, declared one of the placards.

DOWN WITH SCAB HOUSE HAUNTERS, declaimed a second.

A third, and very windy placard asserted that, AMERICAN UNION OF AMALGAMATED CHAIN RATTLERS IS 100% BEHIND NATIONAL DEFENSE!

This was indeed reassuring, and I told Brother Manners so.

"We're a patriotic bunch," he declared solemnly.

OUR entrance was noticed for the first time, for there was a burst of cheering and applause, as hundreds of hooded heads turned in our direction. Brothers Manners and Bead, throwing out their chests proudly, took me by the arm and led me down the aisle through the cheering throngs and up into the boxing ring.

There was a short, rotund, shrouded little ghost already in the ring, and Brothers Manners introduced me to him.

"Brother Wumpf, here, is our secretary. Brother Wumpf, meet our new brother, Ronnie Sayers."

Brother Wumpf extended a fat, cordial paw and grinned charmingly from inside his shroud.

"Glad to know you, Brother Ronnie," he said cheerfully. "I've been waiting to meet you. Have a nice trip?"

"Oh, jolly," I answered lamely. "Just ripping."

Then Brother Manners stepped to the center of the ring, holding up his arms for silence. Almost instantly, the ghost crowds subsided.

"Brothers," declared Brother Manners loudly, "we have with us this afternoon a new and rather famous member, Brother Ronnie Sayers!"

This was the signal for instantaneous and gratifying applause. Brother Manners let it continue for a while, then raised his arms again.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"He will be apprenticed immediately upon your approval. And we'll take a rising vote on the question." He paused. "All in favor of admitting the new brother please stand."

There was the sound of many shrouds sliding against wood as the crowd rose in unison.

"Fine," said Brother Manners, and the "yeas" resumed their seats.

"Now all those against the proposal," boomed Brother Manners.

No one rose.

Brother Manners turned, grinning from ear to ear.

"Welcome, Brother Ronnie Sayers. We're glad to have you!" he grabbed my hand.

The stadium broke into cheers. I blushed, shuffling a bit in awkward embarrassment, while successively, Brothers Bead and Wumpf gripped my hand. Now Brother Manners took my hand again, in a curious fashion, folding my fingers oddly.

"This," declared Brother Manners, "is the lodge grip." He paused solemnly. "Practice it and remember it. It will mean much to you in years to come."

I shook hands again with Brothers Bead and Wumpf, this time with the lodge grip. Everyone was very happy.

At last Brother Manners stepped up to the front of the ring again and spread his arms wide. And again the silence was quick in settling over the noisy crowd.

"Has all the business been concluded before our arrival?" he asked. There was a thundering chorus of "Yeesssss!"

Brother Manners smiled.

"Then I move we adjourn until the next meeting," he suggested. "All in favor please rise."

For the second time there was the sound of shrouds sliding against wooden chairs. All the brothers had risen as a man, or as a ghost.

"The ayes have it," trumpeted Brother Manners. "Meeting adjourned for the day!"

I TURNED to Brother Bead.

"This has been swell of you," I began, "and now, if you don't mind, I'll leave you for a little while to—"

Brother Manners broke in on me.

"Leave?" he laughed. "Don't be silly, Brother Ronnie. You're now one of us. You're an apprentice in our lodge, our union."

I frowned. I didn't like the cheer in his voice. I was thinking only of getting to Jo as quickly as possible.

"Which means what?"

"Which means," put in fat Brother Wumpf happily, "that you're to be apprenticed out to our New York branch for training."

"For training," I blurted. "But—"

"You'll have to learn to spook for yourself," Brother Bead reminded me squeakily. "We teach you how. Being a ghost isn't easy, you know."

"And how long," I demanded, thinking of Jo, and that snake in the grass Duane Pearson, "does this apprenticeship last?"

"Three months," Brother Manners said cheerfully.

"Look!" I exploded. And then, carefully, I told them exactly what I thought of the apprenticeship period, and why. "And so," I concluded, "you can't blame me for saying 'excuse me' until I take care of the matter."

Brother Bead looked disapproving.

"Can you use your ghostly powers to their full advantage?" he challenged.

"No," I admitted, "but—"

"Are you thoroughly capable of taking care of yourself in your new status?" Brother Wumpf broke in.

"I don't know," I acknowledged, "but—"

"You're foolish to venture forth

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

without instruction," Brother Manners said. "Why, you don't even know how to use your voice so that humans can hear you."

I had to blink at this.

"Can I learn?" I asked, amazed.

Brother Bead smiled, and squeaked, "Certainly, and plenty more!"

"You know how to lift things, how to physically touch people, or, say, hit them?" Brother Wumpf challenged.

"I never thought of that" I admitted. Proper control of those powers would be a good thing to know, and I could see it.

"Well, then," Brother Manners summed it up. "We'll apprentice you out. You'll learn all these things. Three months won't make that much difference in your plans. In fact, they'll be a help. You'll be thoroughly adjusted by then."

I took a deep breath.

"All right," I said. "I'm game!"

BROTHERS Bead, Manners, and Wumpf had been quite correct. I had a lot to learn. The next three months, although they positively flew by, turned me from a bungling amateur into a first class and quite professional ghost.

I was apprenticed out to a kindly, middle-aged ghost in the Bronx. His name was Brother Watkins, and from him I got my basic training. It seemed that Brother Watkins had a select clientele of swamies, soothsayers, spiritualists and mystics—who knew about such things—for whom he did most of his work.

I learned how to impersonate voices. How to appear when I wanted to, and disappear when I wanted to. I became an expert at tilting tables and making objects float about rooms. I developed a special, hollow, ghostly voice which I could use when the occasion demanded it.

Now and then Brother Watkins sent me out on house haunting assignments, the first few of which scared the daylights out of me. But I learned to clank chains professionally, and if you don't think this a difficult feat, try it sometime—any time. There is a delicate, rotating wrist motion necessary to make professional clanking.

Brother Watkins knew his stuff. And from him I learned other things. We used to go for walks in the off hours, and in these long strolls he told me endless tales of ghost history and lore, filling up my background on that subject very neatly.

Although I'd been sure that everything seemed far from morbid or unpleasant from the very first hours in which I was a ghost, I learned from Brother Watkins that this new life was not only not bad, but that it was distinctly superior to my previous existence as a human. There was no struggle for existence, for example, because sustaining life was quite unnecessary.

Eating was superficial. But Brother Watkins gave me ghost pills which had all the pleasures of fine meals—from the standpoint of sensation—at any time that I felt a craving for a thick steak or pheasant dressing. Ghost cigarettes were plentiful, and I learned that the lodge had an undiminishing supply of them which it gave freely to any member. Smoking was, incidentally, still as enjoyable as ever.

And, most important of all, ghosts didn't grow old. They stayed just as they were at the time they became ghosts. I, for example, was entitled to perpetual youth.

Boredom, too, was out. For as ghosts we had the opportunity to live beside the world for the duration of its existence—watching it change, struggle,

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and improve itself. Our task, over and above the mundane jobs of ghosting as humans expected us to, was dedicated to—of all things—"making the world a better place in which to live!"

And there was no gloom, no pall, to hang over as in the case of live human beings. Ghosts are an exceptionally good natured, easy-going, cheerful lot. The ghost world—I learned—was an utterly blissful one, a real Shangri La.

Personally, I would have been quite blissfully contented with my lot. Certainly I had no envy for the world I'd left behind me. As I say, I'd have been perfectly contented, but for one thing.

Jo was still in my mind.

I told this to Brother Watkins on one of our strolls. He shook his head sympathetically.

"It isn't easy," he agreed. "But those things have a way of working out."

I told him that I hoped he was right. But his only reply was an understanding smile. And as I said, time raced by, and before I knew it, my apprenticeship was up. I was finally ready to go forth to spook for myself.

"I suppose you'll be heading back to Brock City," Brother Watkins said, taking my hand in the lodge grip.

I nodded.

"But I'll be seeing you soon," I insisted.

Brother Watkins smiled.

"There's plenty of time," he replied. "Plenty of time."

I hesitated. Brother Watkins was a good scout.

"Say hello to the boys back in Brock City," Brother Watkins said. "Give them my best."

"I will," I assured him. "I certainly will."

I TOOK a train back to Brock City. That was one of the things I'd learned from Brother Watkins. Ghosts don't necessarily have to hitchhike wherever they go. After all, a ghost has as much privacy on a first class vehicle of transportation as anywhere else. You'd be surprised at the number of ghosts traveling the country first class.

Before leaving the depot in the heart of Brock City, I took great pains in primping up and getting ready to look my best for Jo. After all, three months was a long time to be away. She wouldn't see me, of course, although by now I'd learned how to enable her to do so if I wished. The principle of the thing, however, was what counted.

By telephoning a depot taxi stand from a booth a few hundred feet away, I arranged my transportation out to Jo's suburban estate. We use your telephone communications frequently.

In this case I called the nearby taxi stand, told them a cab was wanted at Jo's place. Then I walked over to the stand until I saw the starter give the order to a cabbie. I climbed in, then, and settled back with a cigarette to vision how lovely Jo would look when I arrived.

Brother Watkins had taught me a lot.

After a ride of a little less than an hour, the cab turned up the gravel drive leading to the sprawling manor which belonged jointly to Jo and her Uncle Chester—he's the one who was on the other side of her at my funeral.

It was a distinct treat to see the place again after all those weeks. And when the indignant cab driver argued with the butler, insisting that someone had called for a taxi, I climbed out of the hack and took a leisurely stroll around the familiar old grounds.

Five minutes later, after the taxicab had angrily snarled off down the gravel driveway, I was comfortably seated in the shade of the trees off the tennis

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

court, looking at the carved initials on the trunks—Jo's and mine—and indulging in a lot of pleasant nostalgia.

It was late afternoon, and the sun was going down, giving a little chill to the air. I was making up my mind to get inside and have a look around, when I heard footsteps on the turf behind me. I scrambled quickly to my feet and looked around.

There was Jo!

I TELL you, it was all I could do to keep from making my voice audible, my appearance visible. Her lovely red hair, her pert little nose, the cool depths of her beautiful gray eyes—all were exactly as I remembered them. The eyes weren't quite so cool, of course, for they were troubled and uncertain.

It was all I could do to keep from putting my arms around her. I stepped back as she moved toward me. She seemed to be walking idly, almost unconsciously. And now I saw that her eyes were moist. She had been crying.

Jo stood beside the tree I'd been sitting under moments before. Her hand reached out and lightly touched the place in the trunk where we'd carved our initials.

"Ronnie," she said softly. "Oh, Ronnie. I hope I'm doing the right thing. They tell me I am, Ronnie. They tell me that it's what you'd want me to do. But I wouldn't, except that nothing matters any more."

I was so choked up inside that I didn't realize I'd moved close to her, almost close enough to put my arms around her. And then an amazing thing happened.

The troubled doubt left her eyes.

"Ronnie," she breathed. "It's—it's just as if you're right beside me. I'd swear you were close enough to put your arms around me."

Frankly, I'm not the superstitious sort, but this made my spine tingle.

And then she turned, in a happy, dazed sort of way, and began to walk back to the sprawling old manor. I had to stand there and let her go, while I tried to drown a few emotions and stop my mind from whirling.

Somehow I felt wildly, joyously happy. Jo still loved me. Jo would always love me!

But suddenly it occurred to me. What had she said? What was all that stuff about what "they" wanted her to do? Something, a ghostly premonition, if you will, made me feel decidedly uneasy all of a sudden.

Just then a large maroon limousine turned up the driveway, and minutes later, as I watched the passengers get out, chattering gaily, and enter the house, I decided that something screwy was certainly going on. And whatever that something was, I'd soon know what it was all about!

WITH the cunning and skill that only Brother Watkins could have developed in me, I used my ghostly advantages to thoroughly investigate everything and everybody in the huge, sprawling manor. I listened to servants conversing. I rummaged through drawers in Uncle Chester's study. I cut myself in on the conversation among the recently arrived guests. And this is what I learned.

Jo was going to marry Duane Pearson!

It took me less than an hour to find this out. And it took me less time than that to find out the "why" of it. Obviously not herself in the months that followed my death, Jo's guidance had been snakily taken over by the thin nosed Pearson.

He had passed himself off at first as one of my very best friends. Which was a bare-faced fraud. Then, ingra-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tiating himself with her Uncle Chester —who although a likeable old duck was none too bright—the bounder worked his way around to suggesting marriage as the only thing to give Jo a new life.

Jo, poor kid, had protested against this at first. But being in a state of almost constant dazed bewilderment, she'd been literally pushed into agreeing before she knew what was going on. And now, this very evening, as attested by the guests who had already arrived, Jo's Uncle Chester—the blithering ass —was going to announce her engagement to Duane "Stinker" Pearson!

I don't have to tell you what my reactions to this were. I had a first blinding flash of rage in which I decided I would throttle Duane Pearson the moment he arrived at the manor. But then, reason made me discard this, inasmuch as it wouldn't help poor Jo's already distraught state of mind.

I paced back and forth around the house as guests continued to arrive. They were admitted to the lounge, where cocktails were being served, and where Jo and her Uncle Chester received them. It wouldn't do me any good to look at Jo again, I felt badly enough as it was. So I stayed out of the lounge and panthered back and forth over the rest of the house, wrestling with the problem in my mind.

About five o'clock, I hit on an idea—or I should say a series of ideas. And by five-fifteen, I determined that this would be my best and only course. I got Brother Manners on the telephone.

"Look," I said, after talking about three minutes, "have you got all that straight?"

"Certainly, Brother Ronnie," he said heartily. "You can depend on me to come through. Glad to be of help."

"It means everything," I reminded him.

"Count on it," he repeated. "We're happy to help."

I'D LEARNED from the conversation of the servants that the dinner would begin at seven o'clock, and that the engagement would be announced at the conclusion of the fourth course. This would give me sufficient time to build up to the desired climax—I hoped.

After my conversation with Brother Manners, I went back to the door of the lounge and stood there moodily peering in at the guests and listening to the conversation. Jo, as I said before, moved around through all this mechanically, like a person in a bad dream.

But when the butler announced, "Mr. Duane Pearson!" I went into action.

Pearson came strutting up to the door of the lounge like a particularly nasty cat might look just after topping off a dinner of hapless canary. He was wearing evening clothes, and poised dramatically at the door, he touched the corner of the little moustache that hid beneath his long sharp nose. This was his moment of triumph.

Smiling, Pearson stepped over the threshold.

Also smiling, I stuck out my foot, tripped him neatly, and sent him sprawling headlong into the room on his face!

The confusion was immediate, not to mention several hysterical giggles and one or two repressed curses from Pearson himself as two servants helped him to his feet.

I slipped into the lounge as the embarrassment subsided and the conversation resumed again some two minutes later. Pearson, looking like a ruffled peacock, after having paid his respects to Jo and Uncle Chester, had now moved over to chat with some friends.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

When I saw the butler bringing a tray of drinks Pearson's way, I moved over beside him and bided my time.

"She's really lovely, and I'm certainly lucky," Pearson said to one of his friends, after taking a glass from the tray.

"Here's to you both," someone said.

Pearson raised his glass. It was a gallant gesture, and would have gone over quite well if I hadn't reached out and tilted the contents down on him just as he'd lifted the cocktail to its peak!

Of course, this led to a great deal more confusion, and resulted in Pearson looking like a drenched duck, or an angry fish. Take your choice. I was beginning to be glad I'd come.

Old Uncle Chester was beginning to fix Pearson with a beady eye, as though trying to decide if the young man had been drinking heavily before his arrival. Other guests were beginning to snicker in his direction.

And Pearson, although still wearing a fixed smile, was beginning to look grim around the corners of his mouth. So far so good.

Of course, when he took another drink from another tray, I managed to have him spill it quite completely over a dowager who sat beside him. This resulted in angry shrieks, much more confusion, and a growing hysterical gleam in Pearson's eyes.

I was working smoothly, and on each occasion I thanked Brother Watkins.

PEARSON, grimly deciding that there would be a certain safety in being seated, sought an empty chair with his eyes. When at last he located it, I beat him to it.

This, I must admit, is crude. But he was a sucker for the old pull-the-chair-away-as-they-sit-down gag. And since there was no one to notice it moving just enough, and since no one was within five feet of the chair, Duane Pearson was forced to a lot of apoplectic apologies and explanations after he'd picked himself up from the floor.

The hysteria in his eyes was swiftly approaching the cracking point. I was getting quite pleased with myself, when, unexpectedly, old Uncle Chester rose and announced dinner.

It was an obvious move to get ahead with things before further disaster started. And realizing this, I had to curse. This shot my time schedule all to hell. The time schedule I'd given to Brother Manners. And if Manners were too late— I hated to think of it.

Still crude, but still effective, I worked the chair stunt on Pearson again as they all sat down to dine. There must have been thirty guests to witness his shamefaced confusion as he came up from under the table.

But now I let up for a while, and turned my attention to Jo. A lot was going to depend on her ability to stand shock. It was risky business, and I didn't dare let it miss fire. My psychology had to be good—awfully good.

Jo had watched the various Pearson disasters with a vague blankness that was at once comforting, and disturbing. It was comforting to see that she obviously cared so little for him. But it was disturbing to think of the risk I was going to have to take while she was in such a condition.

I looked at my watch. It was a quarter to seven. I had told Brother Manners to get it here by a quarter after seven at the very latest. But now things were running ahead of my schedule.

Believe it or not, I began to feel cold sweat running down my spine. I tried to keep my eyes away from Jo, and busy myself with heckling Pearson.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Which was a mistake.

I'd just neatly spilled a bowl of soup in Pearson's lap, and he was on his feet howling while the rest of the guests looked on aghast, when old Uncle Chester, sensing that it would be now or never, stood up and began pounding on the side of his glass with his spoon. Pearson who, lips working madly, slumped back into his chair mopping his lap.

Now I knew that I'd again forced the time schedule up a notch. Old Uncle Chester, before the entire affair got out of control, was obviously going to announce the engagement now.

AND it was only seven o'clock! I looked at Jo, and felt that awful aching tug at my heart. If I'd messed this big chance—

Old Uncle Chester was clearing his throat.

"Hah, ahhhh, hah, er, hahahhh," he began. "Please, your attention, ladies and gentlemen." He clinked his spoon on the edge of the glass again as if to give himself confidence, and looked doubtfully at Duane Pearson.

"It is my—hah—extreme pleasure, hrrumph, to, ah announce this evening —hah—that my niece, Jo, is betrothed to—hah—, hfph," he was off again, clearing his throat a mile a minute.

I wanted to die—if I'd been able to. It was that terrible. Brother Manners, I was now positive, would be too late.

"Kaff," Uncle Chester picked up with words again. "Where was I? Oh—hah, kaff, yes, I recall. To announce the betrothal of my niece, Jo, to—"

And at that instant, while I tried in agony to tear my eyes from Jo's almost pitiful expression of resignation, someone grabbed me from behind, and I wheeled to face Brother Manners.

He was breathless, triumphant. But before he could open his mouth, I cried. "Gimmme!" and took the box he held in his hands.

I tore the top off the box as I turned back to the table. Tore the top off and took one look at them and knew they were the real McCoy. Then, wildly, I was throwing them up into the air, over the table, watching them drifting down like so much green confetti.

Four leaf clovers — hundreds and hundreds of them!

They were falling everywhere, and to all the guests it was impossible to imagine from where they came. Out of thin air, it must have seemed to them. But not to Jo. I was watching Jo, and she picked up one, examining it curiously. Then her face was shining like a million haloes, and she stood up.

"Ronnie," she said. "You got them, you darling!" And her voice had that small girl squeal of delight in it I'd always loved. She was smiling, radiantly happy at what she knew.

THE confusion was frantic.

"Take care of things," I yelled to Brother Manners over my shoulder. "And thanks!" I was after Jo.

He nodded, and took over where I left off, throwing four leaf clovers over everyone—from nowhere. The confusion was now panic.

Jo had a head start on me, and I heard the motor of her little sports roadster starting in the garage. When it came thundering down the gravel roadway, I swung in beside her.

She must have felt my presence.

"Oh, Ronnie," she said. "I'm glad, so glad. I knew you'd come."

I didn't answer. The speedometer needle on the car said seventy, and was going up. I grinned. She was headed for the airport. Jo could fly a ship

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

as well as I could. And she had one there.

"You got the clovers," Jo said. And again there was that small kid joy in her voice. "I knew you would, Ronnie. You're so good about things."

I still didn't answer. I didn't have to.

When we got to the airport, Jo had them roll her ship out on the runway. And I was beside her when we took off. She was still radiant with happiness, her nose wrinkling in the elfin way it did when she grinned.

"You're right beside me, Ronnie," she said when she'd leveled the ship at three thousand. "I know it."

And now, for the first time, I let her hear my voice.

"Sure I am, darling. And I'll always be."

"Oh, Ronnie. You sound so happy. It is happy there, isn't it?" she said. "I can't wait to see you."

She pressed the stick downward, throwing the plane into a nose over. Then she kicked the rudder pedals. We were spinning, and the ground was whirling crazily up to meet us!

"It won't be long before I'm in your arms, darling!" she shouted above the scream of the wind. She was beautiful and laughing. "It won't be any time at all!"

And of course it wasn't—it was merely a matter of seconds. . . .

The Editor's Notebook

A CONFIDENTIAL CHAT WITH THE EDITOR

(Concluded from page 6)

our magazine that other pulps don't have. We really are proud of the fact.

But in this kind of magazine, the fans insist that the editor get in and take his kick in the pants, and deliver a few himself—if he can!

Therefore, Kenealy's letter stirs our curiosity and our concern. Why should a reader be a pariah among other readers because he *reads* us? Also, why must a reader (or an author?) be under fourteen to appear in our pages?

The fact is, there is no "why" in either case. Especially that fourteen-year age limit. We know of no author who is anywhere near that age. We have a few (fans who have made the grade, incidently) who are under twenty-one. But not fourteen! And we print letters from some readers who are under fourteen, but a majority are twenty-five to forty years old!

And that paradox of readers *not* reading!

RIGHT here we have an editorial, or should we say personal—yes, we do!—opinion which bears directly on something we have always fostered in our pages—the readers' clubs. Those organizations of readers who band together because of their mutual interest in fantasy.

Some of these groups (the one Kenealy belongs

Asthma Mucus Loosened First Day for Thousands

Do recurring attacks of Bronchial Asthma make you choke, strangle and gasp for breath? Are you bothered so bad some nights that you can't sleep? Do you cough and cough trying to raise thick strangling mucus, and strain so hard you fear rupture? Are some attacks so bad you feel weak, unable to work? Are you afraid of colds, exposure and certain foods?

No matter how long you have suffered or what you have tried, we believe there is good news and palliative hope for you in a splendid medicine which was originally a doctor's prescription but that is now available to sufferers at all drug stores under the name of **Mendaco.**

Mendaco usually works very rapidly because it contains ingredients intended to help nature loosen thick, strangling excess mucus. And you know from your own experience if you can just raise that strangling phlegm you can sleep well, breathe deeply of God's fresh air and not feel like there was an iron band around your chest crushing out your very life.

Money Back Guarantee

Mendaco is not a dope, smoke, injection or spray, but is in pleasant, tasteless tablets. Formula on every package. In fact **Mendaco** has proved such a great palliative success for thousands suffering recurring choking, strangling symptoms of Bronchial Asthma that a printed guarantee with each package insures an immediate refund of your money on return of empty package unless you are completely satisfied. Under this money back guarantee you have everything to gain and nothing to lose, so ask your druggist for **Mendaco** today and put it to the test. **Only 60c.**

Advertisement

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to) apparently have turned their organization into one which does not have the mutual interest among members of the original thing that brought them together, fantasy, and the fantasy magazine. Yet, they write letters advising your editor on his policy, using their club as an authority to validate their criticism or suggestion. Obviously, since they *do not read* the magazine, they are not qualified to have a voice in making up the policy of fantasy magazines, and especially of *Fantastic Adventures*. *That* job, and privilege, belongs solely to you readers who *read* us, and like us, and want to make us even better.

Thus, we say to Mr. Kenealy, and many others who have expressed his opinions to us, there is a good way to cut out all this foolishness. Either kick the radicals, the nuts, and frankly, the fools, out of your fan clubs, or get out and form a new one of which you can be proud to be a member.

What do you say, *readers!*

YOU readers who have been awaiting the return of Oscar, the Martian detective, have probably forgotten him by this time. Your editor, too, struggles through the dim corridors of his mind, seeking stray flashes of the lovable little Martian. Let's see now, what *did* happen to the little rascal? Oh yes! Julian S. Krupa had a sketch okayed for a cover painting, and that was nearly six months ago. As yet, we haven't got a painting, and the story has been awaiting publication ever since.

Your editor, by heaven, will shoot that story at you in the next month or two! Cover or no cover. And then we'll shoot Krupa.

The truth is, though, that Mr. Krupa has become so busy on work for the slicks, that he just can't get around to us anymore. Well, we *knew* he was a good artist. . .

JOE SEWELL, who does those splendid Scientific Mysteries for our companion magazine, *Amazing Stories,* came in the other day and asked us to give him a story to illustrate. We did, and in a month or two you'll see the result. We gave him a tough one for the first one, just to test his mettle.

HANNES BOK, whom we sent several illustration orders (plus a St. John cover he wanted to hang on his studio wall) seems to be a rather mysterious individual. Uncle Sam can't find him. The orders come back "not found here" and also the cover. Now, maybe if Hannes will send us his correct address, we'll try again, but frankly, these weird story artists! They're just too, too weird. Live in invisible studios or something!

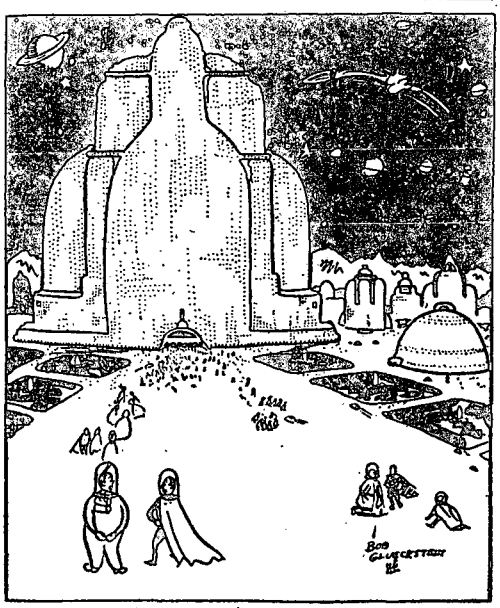
JULIUS SCHWARTZ, fantasy fiction agent, who handles such boys as Eric Frank Russell, Thornton Ayre, Polton Cross, and many others, passed through Chicago on his way to New York. The unlucky man had just been on a two-month vacation in sunny California! Incidentally, he says, I've got a bunch of fine stories for you. Well, we hope he has. It's been some time since Hok, the caveman, The Golden Amazon, and other characters that come via his grapevine, have appeared in our magazines.

WE RECEIVED a very mystic telegram from Arthur T. Harris the other day. Art, you know, is the author who gave us that yarn about Valhalla some time ago. He said: "Have gone back on standard time. Kiss the boys goodbye." Does this mean, we wonder, that he's quit writing fantasy fiction? Well, we pass on his kisses to whomever the "boys" are. I'm sure they'll know know what he meant—and explain it to us!

DID anybody happen to notice that Mars passed very close to us recently. As close as it has, or will, in a long time. And no invasion! Tsk, tsk!

SOME months ago a fan wrote us and told us he liked this column because it was so newsy, friendly, man-to-man, and controversial, and that the editor wasn't afraid to say what he thought, and pass on what his readers thought. Well, we seem to have done all that and more, this issue, eh? And we're much interested in your comments on the same. Your editor is just weak enough in character to like to brag, and to receive compliments, and sometimes he wonders if it's because he isn't so hot that "letters of fire" are heaped on his cringing cranium? What a silly thought! We'll just skip it—and duck.

RAP.



"Ha—you should see the Chrysler building!"

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Carruthers signed his name to the contract with a flourish

A half-million dollars was a fortune, and Carruthers figured his body would be worthless to him after he was dead anyway!

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Carson Carruthers

by

WILLIAM P. McGIVERN

WHEN the Broadway musical "Jumping Jive," folded after a two days' run, everybody but the cast agreed that it had lasted two days too long.

The play was a stinker, but that did not mollify Carson Carruthers, a tall, broad young man, who had been one of the leading spear carriers in the production.

"It is a damnable outrage," he cried dramatically to the bare walls of his small room. "It might have been my golden chance, my supreme opportunity to prove my genius, my brilliant thespian artistry. But now," he continued blackly, "all is over, all is past, all is dead!"

Mr. Carson Carruthers was 99 and 44/100% pure ham.

In the same dark mood he gulped a mouthful of coffee and slumped into a chair with the morning paper. Carson Carruthers was a good example of the law of compensation. For all of his magnificent physique and blonde

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

handsomeness, the space between his ears might have been accurately described as an almost perfect vacuum.

He read the comics avidly, then wistfully perused the drama sections, and finally, with a deep, martyred sigh, turned to the help wanted columns. Even artists must eat, and while Carson Carruthers fell far short of fitting the accepted definition of an artist, he still had to eat.

After a few moments his eye lighted on an advertisement that intrigued him. It read:

> "Interesting proposition for young man of commanding physique and refined handsome features. Must be exceptionally good-looking."

Carson rose to his feet and slipped into his coat. He placed his black Homburg carefully on his head and picked up his cane.

Exceptionally handsome?

He peered thoughtfully into the mirror. Yes, he decided judiciously, he *was* exceptionally handsome. With a last glance at the address listed in the advertisement he strode jauntily from the room.

THE house which carried the address stated in the ad was a tall, brownstone structure in lower Manhattan. It was the only building of its type in the block, and this singularity gave it a majestically foreboding appearance.

Carson paused at the foot of the stone steps and checked the address, then trotted briskly up to the door. Before ringing the bell, he removed his hat and carefully smoothed his wavy hair, then squaring his shoulders, punched the button.

The door was opened with a suddenness that surprised him. A small, fat man with ruddy cheeks and twinkling eyes smiled benignly at him over old-fashioned spectacles.

"Come right in," he said cordially. "I was expecting you."

"Were you now?" Carson said, pleased.

With a slight bow that brought his best profile to bear on the fat little man, Carson stepped through the door. The man closed the door and pattered ahead of him into a comfortable room which opened off the hallway.

"Please sit down," he said breathlessly. "Very happy to welcome you to my humble quarters."

Carson sat down and carefully crossed his legs. He lighted a cigarette with a debonair gesture, hoping that the flame of the match brought out the lambent shades in his large gray eyes.

The surroundings were as undistinguished as the fat little man who was bustling about behind a square desk set in one corner of the room. Carson noticed with faint distaste that his host was wearing a shiny serge suit and an atrocious high collar, but he managed to assuage his sartorial sensibilities by glancing briefly down at his own immaculately clad figure. This restored him somewhat.

The fat little man had seated himself behind the desk and was staring at him with unfeigned admiration.

"You're Carson Carruthers, aren't you?" he asked.

Carson felt a warm glow stealing over him. If he had been a cat he would have undoubtedly purred.

"That's right," he said chuckling contentedly. "Some of my fans aren't quite as sharp in recognizing me without the grease paint."

The little fellow's smile seemed to imply that such fans were unworthy of the name.

"My name is Minion," he said politely. "I am acting as agent for a very important person who is extremely de-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sirous of purchasing a body. This might seem a little strange to you Mr. Carruthers, but I assure you it is a quite legitimate transaction."

Carson ran a finger about the inside of his natty collar, which had suddenly seemed a bit tight.

"A body?" he said weakly.

Mr. Minion smiled disarmingly.

"That is correct. My client is prepared to pay exceedingly well for his purchase. His only stipulation is that it be a handsome body with a fine healthy appearance. A body, Mr. Carruthers, such as yours."

"Mine?" Carson echoed faintly. "But—"

"Of course," Mr. Minion went on unhurriedly, "when the transaction occurred you would naturally have no further use for your body yourself."

CARSON digested this in silence. For a few seconds his mind turned the idea over without much interest, until suddenly the whole proposition became clear as crystal.

He smiled brightly.

"I say," he cried, "I just get what you're driving at. It's like those fellows who sell themselves to science because they've got two stomachs, or who have green skin or something like that."

Mr. Minion smiled and chuckled.

"You've expressed it very graphically, sir."

Carson beamed.

"Put the thing into a nutshell, didn't I?" he said, pleased with himself. Then a disquieting thought struck him. His smile faded.

"But there's nothing wrong with me," he said dolefully. "Except for an attack of hiccups as a youth, I've been in tip-top shape all my life."

"That," said Mr. Minion, "is precisely the reason you will be suitable. Not only is your physical well-being desirable, but even more important, your magnificent personal appearance makes you the ideal candidate for the proposition."

"Does it now?" Carson said genially. He found himself liking this little fellow more and more. "Of course it would be foolish for me to deny the obvious fact that I am quite exceptionally handsome. In my last review one critic was kind enough to say that in spite of everything I did, I *looked* the part of a matinee idol."

"How kind of him," murmured Mr. Minion. "Now as to price. Would half a million be all right?"

"Well," Carson sighed, "if it's the best—" His voice suddenly faltered as he realized what the other had said.

"A half a million," he gasped. "Y—you mean dollars?"

"Naturally," Mr. Minion said affably.

After the first shock faded away, Carson's well developed ego came to the fore. When all was said and done it was only a proper amount to pay for the remains of Carson Carruthers. If a man with two stomachs could get ten or twenty thousand, it was only logical that much more would be offered for such a perfect specimen as his own. Then a practical thought popped into his mind.

"When do I get the money?" he asked in what he hoped was a casual tone.

"Immediately after you sign the contract," Mr. Minion answered pleasantly.

"Cash?"

"Of course."

Carson relaxed somewhat.

"Usually my manager handles these tiresome affairs," he said. "On my own part I can't generate much enthusiasm over such sordid discussions. I am an artist, not a businessman. Will

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

it be currency or check?"

"Whichever you prefer," Mr. Minion smiled. He was fussing with legal looking papers on his desk and now he shoved one toward Carson and held out a pen.

CARSON scratched his name hurriedly on the bottom line of the contract. A vast excitement was growing on him. A sense of elation was rushing through his veins.

"There you are," he cried, completing his signature with a awkward flourish. "All in order."

"You're quite light-hearted about it," Mr. Minion observed cheerfully.

"It's the gay carelessness of the true artist," Carson said expansively. "Life's to be lived and devil take the hindmost."

"He probably will," Mr. Minion chuckled. He handed Carson a duplicate of the document which he had signed. "Your copy."

"And the money?" Carson demanded with unartistic bluntness, "when do I get that?"

Mr. Minion opened a drawer of his desk and pulled out several crisp stacks of currency. He put five of them into a stack and shoved them toward Carson.

"Here you are," he said.

Carson picked up one of the stacks and saw that it consisted of thousand dollar bills. He swallowed nervously. There was a hundred thousand dollars in each neat bunch.

"All in order," Mr. Minion said genially. "May it bring you much happiness."

Carson stuffed the duplicate contract in his outside pocket and then jammed the money into the inner pockets of his coat.

He was desperately afraid that any instant he was going to wake up and find his landlady standing over him demanding her rent.

"Awfully nice of you," he said faintly. He backed toward the door. "Sure you know what you're doing, and everything?" he asked anxiously. "I mean this is real money and everything. You aren't going to ask for it back, or anything, are you?"

"My dear sir," Mr. Minion said genially, "we have made a bargain and I am sure my client will be delighted. If you are satisfied everything is eminently satisfactory."

"Ev-everything, everything is wonderful," Carson stammered breathlessly. "And—er—thanks. Thanks a million. I mean thanks a half million. Ha! Ha!" he bleated moronically. "A joke! Thanks a half million. Ha! Ha!"

"Very funny," said Mr. Minion opening the door. "Until we meet again, Mr. Carruthers, I wish you the best of everything."

He closed the door quietly and Carson, with a dazed gleam in his eye, put his hat firmly on the head of his cane and wandered blissfully down the steps.

WITH his miraculous wealth, Carson Carruthers proceeded to knock the cynical street of Broadway right on its cynical ear. He revived the languishing "Jumping Jive" with himself in the stellar role—and scored a smash hit!

Then he installed himself and a retinue of servants in a sixteen-room duplex penthouse apartment that was like the realization of a Hollywood producer's dream.

He bought himself dozens of violently colored suits and a tam. He rode the three blocks from his apartment to his theatre in a specially built automobile which tourists often mistook for a runaway streamlined locomotive.

The parties he gave were lavish af-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

fairs, set off by gallons of champagne and tubs of caviar and all the hams on Broadway. He was the life of every party, for he invariably managed to fall or get pushed into his specially constructed swimming pool in full evening attire and this accomplishment is no small one.

There was but one small fly in the ointment.

Her name was Renee.

Into every successful man's life a fiery little French girl must fall, and Carson was no exception to the rule. Renee was the feminine lead in "Jumping Jive" and she was nine-tenths devil cat and one-tenth dark, dangerous femininity.

The minute she saw that Carson had stumbled onto a ready pile of the green stuff, she began to sharpen her claws. Under ordinary circumstances Carson would have been pleased to have such an attractive damsel panting for him, but with Renee it was different. Somehow he realized that if he ever became entangled with her it would take a dredging company to extricate him.

One night as he was leaving the theatre she sidled up to him and slipped her arm through his.

"How's my beeg boy?" she whispered huskily. "Still too busy for leetle Renee?"

"As a matter of fact," Carson said, tactfully disengaging her arm, "I have a date tonight with—"

"Who is she?" Renee blazed.

"Oh just a girl," Carson said uneasily. "No one you'd know. She's a cousin of mine, as a matter of fact."

"You're lying," Renee said smoulderingly. "If you were my man, *cheri,* and ever looked at another woman, do you know what I'd do?"

"I can imagine," Carson said, shuddering mentally.

"I'd cut your heart out," Renee hissed. "Then I'd cut the woman's heart out. After that I would cut my own heart out!"

Carson swallowed the sudden lump in his throat.

"Kind of messy, I'd say," he muttered inanely. "I mean, wouldn't a nice quick round of bullets do the job a bit more neatly? Don't decide right away," he cried hastily. "Think it over carefully. Can't rush into these things, you know."

With that he wheeled and scuttled out of the theatre, and was unable to relax until he reached his luxurious study and had soaked himself with a number of double shots of brandy.

Then his courage returned.

"SILLY of me," he said stoutly to the life-size portrait of Carson Carruthers which hung over the mantel. "Silly to get worked up over a simple matter of a girl."

He had another brandy, and was composing the speech with which he would dust her out of his life forever, when his butler opened the door and announced that a Mr. Minion wished to see him.

"Minion?" Carson said blankly. Then he remembered.

"Show him in," he cried heartily. It was to Mr. Minion that he owed everything.

Mr. Minion entered the spacious room looking exactly as Carson had seen him in the tacky room of the brownstone house, two months ago. He still wore the shiny serge suit and high collar, and his round red face still wore its expression of silent admiration.

"Delighted to see you, my dear fellow," Carson cried. "Sit down, won't you?"

"Thank you," Mr. Minion replied politely. He seated himself gingerly on the edge of a red leather chair.

"Everything going well with you?"

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

he inquired pleasantly.

"Splendid," Carson said heartily. He was glad he had on his red silk dressing gown, and was smoking a cigarette in his foot-long holder. It gave him a feeling of nonchalant importance.

"I'm glad to hear it," Mr. Minion said earnestly.

"Yes, things are excellent," Carson said, resting his elbow on the mantle. "Was there anything in particular you wished to see me about?"

Mr. Minion shook his head with a little smile.

"No. Nothing at all. I just happened to be passing, and I thought I'd drop in and see that you were—ah—keeping fit."

Carson yawned elaborately.

"In that case, since I'm rather exhausted—"

Mr. Minion stood up.

"I hope I haven't bored you," he said anxiously. "I really must be going."

"So soon?" Carson asked, leading him toward the door. "Feel free to drop in any time, Mr. Minion. Although my art is a stern and trying master, I always have time to say a few words to old friends. Good night, Mr. Minion."

"Good night," Mr. Minion said pleasantly. "Until we meet again, enjoy yourself."

Carson closed the door on the little man's round figure, a faint frown creasing his brow. He found himself curiously disturbed by Mr. Minion's visit.

"Nonsense," he told himself severely. "You're just tired. You give too much of yourself to the theatre. A night's sleep will fix you up."

So he went to bed, but he found it strangely hard to get to sleep.

IN THE morning Carson thought more about Mr. Minion's visit, but in the sunny brightness of a new day he was able to smile at his nervousness of the previous evening.

It was only logical for the fellow to pop in from time to time. After all they had signed a contract.

It occurred to Carson for the first time that he had never read the contract which he had signed in the brownstone house two months previously.

"Always the artist," he sighed. "Too preoccupied with the drama of Life to pore over musty scraps of paper."

Then he hurried to his closet to find the contract, which he remembered having stuffed carelessly into the coat he had been wearing.

The suit was fortunately still in his wardrobe, and his anxious fingers plucked from its pocket the bulky sealed contract which he had accepted from Mr. Minion.

Seating himself in a comfortable chair and lighting a cigarette, Carson broke the seals of red wax and spread out the contract. The contract was written in long hand, with many Spencerian flourishes, and at the top of the paper was the name Carson Carruthers.

"Ah!" Carson said, "top billing."

Then his eyes dropped to the body of the contract. It read:

The above named, who shall henceforth be known as the party of first part does hereby transfer to Satan, who shall henceforth be known as the party of the second part, his corporeal substance intact and complete. This transfer shall take place not later than two months after the signing of this unholy contract. In consideration of this, the party of the second part, who is alias Lucifer, Beelzebub, Old Nick etc., does agree to give the party of the first part such monies and material possessions as he does demand. (In this case a half-million dollars. M.)

Witnessed by Satan's personal minion.

Signed

Carson Carruthers

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

On the bottom were the words *His Mark* and the stamp of a cloven hoof!

Carson read the contract three times before he made any sense out of it. According to this preposterous contract he had sold his body to the devil! What a silly idea! Someone was trying to pull his leg, that was obvious. For whoever heard of anyone selling his body to the devil? A soul maybe, but certainly not a body.

He re-read the contract again, chuckling. According to it the time limit of two months would be up—why it would be up today! Today was the deadline.

Carson stood up and tossed the parchment onto a table. It was all so absurd. Even to the point of being witnessed by the devil's personal minion.

It was then Carson recalled that the round little man who had arranged the deal had called himself Mr. Minion. That gave him a slight start.

"But it's all so perfectly ridiculous," he said aloud, a moment later.

Then another question popped into his mind.

If everything was so silly, why had the man who called himself Minion given him the half-million dollars?

Carson Carruthers was not superstitious, but he did have a streak of caution in his make-up.

"I think I had better see this fellow, Minion," he muttered nervously.

HE DRESSED hurriedly and left his apartment. Downstairs he called a cab and gave the driver the address of the brownstone house in lower Manhattan. Settling back against the cushions, his poise returned. When he saw Minion, he'd get this thing straightened out in a hurry. If anyone was trying to play practical jokes on Carson Carruthers they'd rue it before he finished with them.

The lines of a play, in which he had been a spectacular flop, came to him.

"The blighters will know the feel of my steel, before another sun has set," he cried grimly.

"What?" the cabby said, shooting a startled look back at his fare.

"Er-nothing," Carson said. "How much farther?"

"Block or so," the cabby answered, swinging his hack off the boulevard into a side street.

Carson recognized the houses on the street. They were all two-story wooden structures, and they stood out in his mind because they were all so different from the five story brownstone in the middle of the block. The five-story brownstone which he had visited two months ago to the day.

The cab came to a stop. The driver looked back at him questioningly.

"Here we are," he said.

Carson looked out and saw that they were parked in front of a deserted, vacant lot.

"This is the address you gave me," the cabby said, answering the unspoken question in Carson's large grey eyes.

"But it can't be!" Carson cried. "The house I want is a five-story brownstone. It's in this block. It must be farther down."

The cabby shook his head.

"I know the neighborhood pretty well," he said, "and there ain't never been any house like that along this street. Are you sure you got the right address?"

Carson *was* sure, but thinking the thing over, he decided that he must have made a mistake. There was certainly no house in this block that even resembled the one he had visited. The only thing to do was to check the address from the advertisement in the newspaper.

"Drive me to the office of the *Standard*," he ordered.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE girl in the filing department of the newspaper was courteous and efficient. She brought him a bound volume of the paper and helped him find the issue of the date he was seeking.

Carson thanked her and turned quickly to the help wanted columns. His finger ran down the second column to where he remembered he had seen the ad.

A worried frown creased his forehead. The ad didn't seem to be in the same place. He ran through the entire five columns of help wanted ads, but he found nothing that even faintly resembled the ad he had answered.

He called the courteous, efficient girl and informed her that something was wrong with the paper.

She in turn, called the department manager and informed him that this gentleman had informed her that something was wrong with the paper.

"I answered an ad in this paper," Carson explained desperately. "Now I can't find it. The ad has gone, disappeared, vanished."

The courteous efficient girl and the department manager exchanged looks.

"Ads don't vanish," the department manager said, with just a touch of coldness in his voice. "Not from the *Standard* anyway. However we shall check our files and see if such an ad as you describe has been listed in our columns."

In ten minutes the courteous, efficient girl informed Carson that no such ad had ever been placed in the columns of the *Standard*.

"Th-thank you," Carson mumbled.

He left the newspaper office and went to his apartment. As he strode into his lounge, a small, round figure stood up from a chair before the fireplace and smiled at him.

"How do you do?" Mr. Minion said pleasantly.

"*You!*" Carson choked. "Where have you been?"

"I've been in—"

"Don't say it," Carson said frantically. "Not if its where I'm afraid you've been. Tell me about all this nonsense of selling my body to the devil. It isn't true, is it?"

"It is quite true," Mr. Minion said with all of his old pleasantness. "You signed the contract and everything is quite definitely legal. The transfer will take place tonight at twelve."

"But why?" Carson cried, "does *he* want my body? I thought he dealt in souls."

"His Malignancy desires to spend some time on Earth in human form. Naturally he must have a human body for this purpose. I was sent up to handle the legal end of things. He insisted on a handsome body, so I selected you. I am sure he will be quite delighted with my choice. If things work out as I hope I may be promoted to foreman of a brimstone crew."

"Stop it!" Carson cried. "It's all some terrible joke. I don't believe a word you say. I'm going out to get drunk and when I get back you'd better be cleared out of here."

"Enjoy yourself until twelve," Mr. Minion smiled.

Carson tore out of the apartment and headed for a bar. As he climbed on a stool and ordered a double brandy, a soft familiar voice cooed in his ear.

"Eet is Renee's beeg boy out for a good time, no?"

Carson jerked around and saw that Renee, clad in a slinky black satin dress, was perched on the stool next to him. Her piquant face was lighted with an insinuating smile, and in the depths of her deep eyes slumbering fires lurked dangerously.

"Have a drink," he said abruptly.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Have lots of drinks. Let's everybody get drunk."

"Babeey!" Renee cried happily . . .

AT eleven forty-five P. M. of the same day, Carson staggered into his library and collapsed on a couch. He was carrying a load of alcoholic beverages that would have taxed a ten-ton truck, and their fiery fumes created a fog before his eyes that cloaked the room in white vagueness. The furniture swam about before his eyes in a circular motion, but finally its rotary activity slowed to the point where he could distinguish a human figure whirling about in one of the chairs.

He blinked his eyes to bring the circling figure into focus, and then was drunkenly sorry that he had done so. For Mr. Minion's pink face emerged from the blur and assumed a stationary position before him. Mr. Minion was facing him, smiling blandly.

"Have a good time?" he asked companionably.

Carson shuddered.

"Go 'way," he groaned.

"Soon I will," Mr. Minion said affably. "In a few moments my work will be completed."

The words shook Carson from his alcoholic stupor.

"Now just a minute," he said blearily. "Don't give me any more of thish stuff about losing my body to Old Nick. It's jush a lot of nonsense, thash all it is."

Mr. Minion sighed and glanced at his watch.

"You shall see," he said quietly. "You have made the bargain and soon you must satisfy your end of it."

The minutes ticked away in silence, and with each passing second, Carson could feel the effects of the brandy fading. A nervous sweat beaded his forehead and his hands twined together anxiously.

He almost jumped a foot off the couch when the clock began to chime the hour of midnight. Then his blood turned to something like ice-water as an angry blast of air whipped through the room, rattling the pictures on the wall and lashing the heavy draperies into tangled swirls.

Mr. Minion rose to his feet. There was a tense, expectant expression on his face, and in the depths of his eyes a nameless fear lurked.

Suddenly the room seemed filled with a rumbling noise. Carson felt the stinging fumes of sulphur in his nostrils, and then a clap of thunder broke against his ears and a flash of lightning seared his eyes.

When his eyes recovered from the sudden shock of the blinding light, he saw that another personage had entered the scene. And the commanding, black-clad height, the baleful glare of the new arrival, left him little doubt as to his identity.

In the center of the room, arms folded, head thrown back arrogantly, Satan surveyed the scene with sardonic amusement.

His raking black eyes swept from Mr. Minion to Carson Carruthers' trembling figure on the couch.

"Is this the man?" he demanded in a voice that sapped the juice from Carson's spine.

"Yes, Your Malignancy," Mr. Minion said diffidently.

IF Carson had thought the whole affair a practical joke at one time, he had no such doubts now. This black creature he was facing was the real thing. He knew it. Although he could see only the black eyes through the heavy mask that covered the evil one's face, they were enough to convince him. Those black eyes that stared so cove-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tously at him were old and hard and malignant beyond the imagination of any man.

"I am satisfied," Satan said abruptly.

"N—now just a minute," Carson said pleadingly. "I didn't know what I was getting into when I signed that contract. Anyway, why do you want my body?"

"I need it," Satan said inexorably. His eyes flicked downward for an instant. Carson followed his gaze and saw the tip of a cloven hoof protruding from beneath the enveloping black cape Satan wore. Also he saw the pronged tip of a horrid-looking tail twitching restlessly.

"I cannot walk the Earth in my present shape," Satan said grimly. "I need a form such as yours for my purposes."

His long arms suddenly raised above his head and fingers spread like the talons of a mighty hawk. Carson saw the flashing lights in the black, malevolent eyes growing brighter before his swimming vision. But just at the instant his senses were leaving him, a shrill angry voice cut through the evil fog that was sweeping over him.

"What the hell ees thees?" the enraged voice cried shrilly. "Who are theese people, Babeey?"

Carson struggled bewilderedly to his feet. Standing in the doorway was Renee, her fiery dark beauty enhanced by the billowing white negligee she was wearing.

At the sound of her voice Satan swept his cloak over his face and crouched close to the floor. Mr. Minion, for once, lost his expression of imperturbable affability. His jaw sagged dazedly.

Renee stamped into the room.

"Who are zey?" she demanded. Must we have a convention here the first night of our marriage?"

"Marriage?" gasped Mr. Minion.

CARSON shook his head as his memory came back to him. After drinking all day with Renee, he recalled that they had gotten married in a little village in Connecticut. He remembered carrying her over the threshold of the apartment and then things had got blackish.

"What business ees eet of yours?" Renee blazed at Mr. Minion. "Thees ees our wedding night. How you say? Our honey-moon!"

"Now darling," Carson said placatingly, as he heard an angry hiss from the crouching figure of Satan.

"Don't 'darling' me!" Renee cried hotly. "Tell theese bums to clear out, or I throw them out!"

"Unworthy minion," Satan said coldly. "My orders were for a single man."

"But," Mr. Minion said imploringly, "I didn't know."

"What ees all theese?" Renee yelled shrilly. Her glance flew to Satan, swept down to the protruding hoof.

"A ventriloquist!" she screamed, whirling on Mr. Minion.

"You have ze nerve to bring a goat into my house? How dare you?"

"Madam," Mr. Minion said frantically, "you don't know what you're saying. That is not a goat, that—"

"Never argue with a woman," Satan said moodily. "I got my fingers burnt once that way."

"More ventriloquist beesiness!" Renee shrieked. Her hair was tousled, and her small white teeth were bared angrily. She looked as if she were drawing a bead on Mr. Minion's jugular vein. "Eef you want your goat to leave here alive, eef you want to leave here alive yourself, you will get out before I lose my temper."

"You have failed me, Minion," Satan said blackly.

"The situation is not hopeless, Master," Mr. Minion said pleadingly.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Even though Heaven has joined them, cannot Reno divorce them?"

Renee sprang for a vase. With a delivery that Lefty Grove might have envied, she hurled it straight at Mr. Minion. It missed him by an inch and crashed into the wall.

"Peeg!" she screamed. "Get out!"

She sprang for another vase.

Satan slunk toward the door.

"We leave," he snarled. "Even if I could become this woman's husband, I would rather go back to hell—" With an angry, baffled hiss, he swept his arms down in a vicious gesture.

A wind whistled through the room and a bolt of light crashed over their heads. When the smoke cleared Satan and his minion had vanished.

"Pooh!" Renee sniffed. "Theese actors. Always zey must make ze dramatic exit."

Carson Carruthers, who had been standing helplessly throughout the entire stormy scene, suddenly slumped backward onto the sofa, a gusty sigh wheezing through his lips.

Renee slipped onto his lap.

"My babee is so pale," she cooed.

Carson gulped.

"A—am I?" he said faintly.

Renee rested her cheek against his.

"You remember what I say;" she murmured softly, "what I do if I catch you wit' another woman? You remem- I say I cut your heart out?"

"Y—yes," Carson said. "I remember."

"Well don't forget it!" Renee cooed dreamily. "What God has put together let no man or woman—*or goat,* put apart!"

"No darling," Carson Carruthers said thinking of hell, "I won't."

Then he looked at Renee and thought of hell again—wistfully.

HOWIE LEMP
Meets an Enchantress

"Come!" the Leanhaun Shee — the beautiful, irresistible maiden, said softly . . . Howie wavered . . . Mazie *snuggled her peroxide head closer to him* . . . "Get out," he said to the Leanhaun Shee. "We'd like to be alone."

For a silent instant the Leanhaun Shee glared at him furiously . . . Then she whipped *the white gown about her shoulders, stepped back* and—vanished!

What comes next in the amazing chain of events that have made a Hollywood producer of soda-jerker Howie Lemp?

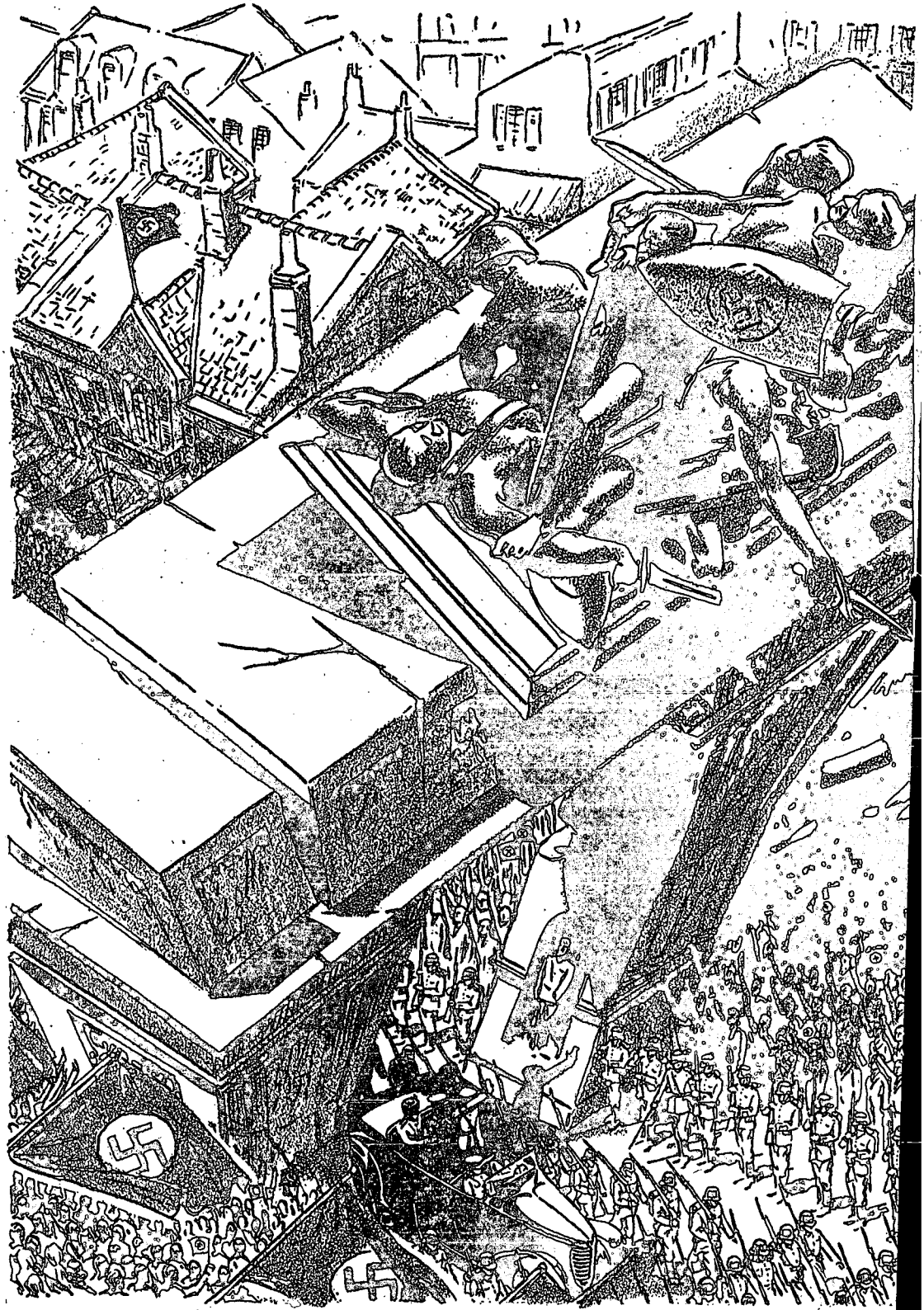
She lived for love—the Leanhaun Shee! . . . As long as men were indifferent to her charms, she was their slave . . . And she chose Howie as her lover! . . . You'll enjoy every moment of his thrill-packed adventures in "Howie Lemp Meets An Enchantress" by William P. McGivern, one of six top-notch stories in the

FEBRUARY ISSUE

fantastic ADVENTURES

ON SALE AT ALL NEWSSTANDS DECEMBER 19th!

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



There came a rending roar and the arch began to collapse

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

V IS FOR VENGEANCE

by DUNCAN FARNSWORTH

The idea was splendid. Nero would pass beneath this specially constructed arch and he'd die. But Vesuvius erupted. . .

THE news has reached me, Tiberius. In the public center, today while I was coming from the baths, it was announced!"

The face of the bronzed young citizen of Rome was visibly excited. And as he spoke, his words were low and pitched in a tempo of tense caution. He took a deep breath, looking covertly over his shoulder.

"*He* is coming. It is official!"

"Coming here, to Goria?" the tall, gaunt, slightly older man drew his loose white toga closer around his lean bones. "Here? Are you certain?"

The lean, bronzed young man nodded excitedly with his response.

"It was announced in the public square, I tell you. It is positive."

The gaunt Tiberius reflected wonderingly on this. "It is more than we dared hope for. It fits the plans of our secret council perfectly. The madman, Nero, is already doomed."

The younger man looked furtively over his shoulder again.

"Not so loud," he whispered warningly. "Your servants might overhear."

The gaunt Tiberius started. "Right, Vintius. Sometimes I forget myself. However," he rose, and spoke softer,

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"our secret council will meet tonight at the edge of the town, on the first cliff of Vesuvius. There we will make our plans for the triumphal reception of Nero into Goria."

"I will be there," declared Vintius.

Tiberius nodded gravely.

"Good. Until then, my son, *Vale!*"

The young man, Vintius, raised his arm in salute.

"*Vale!*" he responded. . . .

* * *

Account taken from Interocean Press Dispatch—

HITLER TO LEAD GIGANTIC VICTORY DEMONSTRATION IN VICHY

(Special Dispatch, I/P, Berlin)

Culminating the widespread Axis counterattack against the underground "V" campaign throughout the Nazi dominated countries in Europe, Adolf Hitler's own press bureau, DNB, announced today that the Fuehrer will be on hand for the demonstration of "European solidarity" to be held in Vichy next Friday.

It is significant that, although Doctor Goebbels' Ministry of Propaganda has stated "V" is a letter of Germanic origin and points to Nazi victory, thousands of underground "V" saboteurs in the occupied nations have been "purged" merely for having symbols of the letter on their persons.

Nevertheless, Nazi plans for the demonstration have been similar in tone to anti-superstition club affairs held in the United States on such days as Friday, the 13th, Halloween, etc. Where U. S. anti-superstition organizations hold their meetings on so-called "unlucky" days, open umbrellas in closed rooms, play with black cats, break mirrors, and walk under ladders; the Nazi demonstration will be on the fifth day of the Roman calendar, in a city whose first letter is "V", with huge Germanic "V" banners being flown beside the swastika, and "V" emblems tagged to all automobiles, including Hitler's own.

This symbolism, of course, is meant to be Nazi mockery of the underground "V" effort, which by now is almost completely wiped out through wholesale Gestapo killings. It is also noted that . . . "

YOUNG Vintius found the secret council and Tiberius at the designated meeting place on the first cliff of Mount Vesuvius that evening. They had gathered in a semi-circular cave, lighted only by the ghostly flickerings of torches. Their talk was that of brave and desperate men.

The gaunt Tiberius held the center of the group.

"We must act now," he insisted. "This is our chance. It is what we have been waiting for. Far better, I say, to slay the tyrant here—in Goria—than to risk the failure of an assassination in Rome."

There was a murmur of agreement from the secret council.

Young Vintius, who had been silent until now, stepped forward.

"I have a plan," he said. "I think it foolproof. I wish to submit it to the wisdom of the council."

Tiberius looked at the younger man.

"Speak, Vintius," he said. "We are eager to hear this plan."

Vintius cleared his throat.

"We all know the overwhelming vanity of the madman, Nero," he declared. "And we all know of his insane desire to imitate the long dead Caesar."

The secret council muttered agreement and quickened interest. All sat forward a bit to better hear the youth continue.

"And in line with this," Vintius declared, "it is also a fact that I am the only architect here in Goria, the only

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

one able to build, to design, a monumental tribute to Nero on his visit here."

The frown on the face of Tiberius mirrored the bewilderment of the others in the group.

"And what has this to do with the assassination?" he demanded impatiently.

Vintius held up his hand.

"Hear me out," he pleaded. "I come to that."

The secret council leaned closer still to catch the words of the young architect of Goria. The flickering torches threw tall shadows of foreboding doom against the walls of the cavern as the death of a tyrant was plotted . . .

* * *

Excerpt from the syndicated newspaper column of the widely read U. S. commentators Shaw and Sinclair; News and Views:

When we stated, purely as a hunch, that Benito Mussolini would try to horn in on Adolf Hitler's "V" demonstration in Vichy, next Friday, it seems we hit the nail on the head. The Italian Dictator won't personally appear at the ceremonies, but he has just donated — to be shipped intact — an ancient Roman arch which supposedly dates back to the time of Julius Caesar.

This arch, only recently unearthed and in an excellent state of preservation, will be assembled in Vichy exactly as it was found by Benito's digger-uppers. Then it will be placed over the avenue of parade so that Der Fuehrer can ride triumphantly beneath it, in the manner that it is supposed Julius Caesar once did. All of which further proves Musso to be but a second rate stage hand for Adolf . . .

IT WAS four days after the meeting of the secret council in the cavern on Mount Vesuvius when the gaunt leader of that group, Tiberius, summoned the young architect, Vintius, to him.

"It is arranged," said Tiberius, when they were alone. "I have persuaded the Town Senate of Goria that some especially fitting tribute should be paid Nero when he makes his visit here."

Young Vintius was elated.

"Good. I had been praying that there would be no obstacle."

Tiberius smiled a little grimly.

"There was no obstacle. Most of the fools in the Town Senate are anxious to get on the good side of their madman emperor. They seek favors and positions. They were happy to sponsor such a suggestion."

"And I?" There was anxiety in Vintius's half query.

"You have been appointed to build the edifice that will honor Nero. For as you pointed out, you are the only architect in Goria. It was simple to suggest your name for the honor," Tiberius reassured the young man.

"And it will be an honor," Vintius said half aloud. "It will be more than an honor to be instrumental in the assassination of the madman, Nero."

Tiberius nodded.

"All of us feel that way." He paused. "I will see to it that you have the details of the parade. According to your plans it is important to know that before beginning your design and construction of the triumphal archway for the emperor."

Vintius smiled.

"Most important. My calculations must be exact. An error would mean disaster."

"You have thought of an appropriate legend to put across the top of the archway?" Tiberius asked.

The young architect nodded.

"An exquisitely ironic one. It is based on the idiot tyrant's love for

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

imitation of the deceased Julius Caesar. It will quote from the great Caesar himself—'Veni, vidi, vici!' It should please the addle-pated Nero immensely."

Tiberius smiled.

"There is no doubt but what it will swell the fool's vanity. And I have a further suggestion that you might inscribe at the very top of the archway—the insignia of Nero's personal Legion, the Fifth."

Vintius smacked his hand on his thigh.

"Excellent!"

Tiberius half closed his eyes.

"I can see it now. Nero riding down the crowded streets of Goria, his Fifth Legion before him. His pig eyes will gleam in insane satisfaction as he sees the triumphal archway ahead of him. He will feel that he is mightier than Julius Caesar ever was."

"And at the very top of the archway will be the despot's own Legion's insignia 'V', while just below that there will be the inscription, 'Veni, vidi, vici!'," young Vintius cut in.

The two smiled at one another then, in the grim satisfaction of sharing an ironic jest . . .

* * *

Excerpts from news ticker tape, Interocean Press Radio Service—

"(Vichy, France)

Benito Mussolini, Adolf Hitler's Axis partner, not only injected an Italian note into next Friday's Nazi 'V' demonstration here in the French Capital when he presented Der Fuehrer with an ancient Roman archway to be used in the ceremonies; he also added to the symbolism of the gigantic demonstration. It has just been revealed that the archway gift bears a great 'V' at its very top, and underneath carries the three-vee slogan, 'Veni, vidi, vici!'

Fascist archaeologists who unearthed the historic archway claim that, from the inscription contained thereon, it must have been used in celebration of Julius Caesar's Fifth Campaign. The archway was found in the little, long-dead hamlet of Goria, at the base of Mount Vesuvius. This town once prominently figured in ancient Roman — . . ."

THROUGHOUT the little town of Goria there was much excitement in the week preceding the visit of the Emperor Nero. The narrow streets were given over to wine festivals, and the public square became the scene of almost daily orations by members of the Town Senate who wanted their praise of the mad emperor recorded in advance of his coming.

But in the workshop of the young architect, Vintius, at the edge of the village, there was no evidence of the festive spirit that had seized the hamlet.

Vintius worked swiftly, grimly, and cunningly. There would have been more than time enough to prepare an ordinary triumphal arch for the visit of Nero that week. But the labors of Vintius were additionally difficult because of the task he had at hand.

This was to be no ordinary archway.

"This is to be my masterpiece," the young man told the townspeople who flocked curiously to watch him at work.

And they nodded, and marveled, not realizing what he really meant by his words.

Tiberius, however, stayed far from the workshop. It was better that he do so. And it was better that the conversations he had with the young designer be held in private in the flickering torchlight of the cavern of Vesuvius where they met late at night.

And it was on the night that preceded Nero's visit by three days that Vintius was able to tell his older fellow

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

conspirator quietly.

"It is finished, Tiberius. I made my final tests today."

The gaunt Tiberius nodded in satisfaction.

"I have but to order it transported to the public square," Vintius went on. "There it will be ready to wreak vengeance on the blood-thirsty knave who calls himself Emperor of the Romans."

Tiberius spoke gravely.

"Good. I shall pass the word on to the others. Our victory is almost at hand. We will hold a final meeting on the eve of the tyrant's arrival. I think it will be safe for you to be on hand. The archway will be erected in the square by then."

Young Vintius rose. He held up his hand in salute.

"Until then, my friend," he said.

Tiberius placed his hand on the younger man's shoulder.

"I am proud of you, my son," he said with sudden emotion. "You do much for Rome."

"What I do, I do for freedom, for the elimination of blood and madness and tyranny on this earth," Vintius replied simply.

They parted then, at the mouth of the cavern on Vesuvius, agreeing to meet again on the eve of Nero's arrival . . .

* * *

From an Interocean Press Dispatch—

LONDON SCIENTISTS SCOFF AT MUSSOLINI ARCH ACCOUNT

(London, Special I/P Dispatch)

Prominent archaeologists here today issued a statement branding the archway donated by Mussolini to the Vichy anti-V demonstration next Friday as historically fraudulent.

Sir Gifford Stone, noted Oxford scientist, speaking for a group of his fellows at Queen's College declared, "The much publicized triumphal archway which Benito Mussolini has donated to his fellow blackguard's anti-V demonstration in Vichy, next Friday, is historically fraudulent.

Claiming that it was used by Julius Caesar," Sir Gifford went on, "the Italian archaeologists are tossing the truth about like a propaganda bureau. Scientific record shows that the little town of Goria, in which the archway was unearthed, was never at any time visited by Caesar during his reign. Scientific record also proves that the words, 'Veni, vidi, vici!,' were as then unspoken by Caesar if the arch was constructed to celebrate his Fifth Campaign—which the Italians claim."

Sir Gifford concluded, "Obviously the archway must be of later origin if it is authentic. Possibly it is of the Nero period in Roman history. If this is true, then the similarity between the bloody idiot Emperor, Nero, and Der Fuehrer needs no comment. Both loved to ape the great Julius Caesar."

THE secret council met in the same cavern of Vesuvius on the eve of Nero's visit to Goria. Vintius was there, as he had promised Tiberius he would be. And while the torchlights flickered eerily once again, the young man described his final machinations on the archway.

"The archway is so constructed," Vintius declared, "that we are assured of success. Nero's Fifth Legion marches before him—that is the plan—and he follows immediately behind in the great chariot. The vibrations caused by the marching Legion will set up the destruction of the arch, shake the vulnerable points in its construction."

"But how," objected one of the council, "are we to be absolutely assured that it will crash when Nero is beneath it? Supposing it crashes before or after that moment?"

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"It will not," Vintius assured him. "Nero's chariot follows the Fifth Legion at a distance of less than ten strides. The sudden pause in the vibration of the marching that will occur, just as the madman's chariot rolls under the arch, will be enough to send the great stone blocks of the structure tumbling down upon the despot."

Tiberius spoke for the council.

"It is clear, Vintius. You are clever. Obviously that pause in vibration, once the feet of Nero's soldiers are no longer thudding beneath the structure, will be enough." He looked around the cavern. "I am sure that—"

The last of Tiberius's sentence was drowned in the sudden deafening rumble beneath the floor of the cavern. And suddenly the walls and ceiling of the cave were swaying, cracking, as the noise grew greater and greater.

Vintius was on his feet.

"The Mount!" he shouted, unheard. "The Mount is quaking everywhere around us!"

Tiberius had been thrown to the stone floor of the cavern by another and greater shock. At the far end of the cave the rocks were already giving under the tremendous pressure above them.

The torches had been knocked from their places in the walls, and all was darkness now, save for the entrance to the cavern, which was sprayed by drenching red flashes of fire. Vintius was beside Tiberius, desperately trying to lift the older man to his feet.

"The Mount," whispered Tiberius, gray faced, "is erupting!" He choked, smoke was filling the place. "Those sparks, the flame, volcanic fury, boy. Get out while you can!"

Vintius lifted Tiberius in his arms, and stumblingly carried him to the door of the cavern. The rest of the secret council were milling there, not daring to brave the steady shower of flame and sparks that screened the exit.

Vintius was about to shout at them, to scream that they should flee while there was still time, when he saw the thick, boiling flood of lava that was everywhere outside. No man could dash through it. And through the sparks and flame, Vintius could see down the mountainside, where the entire village of Goria lay helpless beneath the rushing stream of boiling death that cascaded down from the volcano mouth onto the village. Goria was doomed.

"It is the end, my son," Tiberius said. His face was ashen, sweat streaked, but his eyes faced death calmly. "There is no escape for us. We'll not live to destroy the tyrant."

VINTIUS placed the older man gently down on the floor.

"Don't," he pleaded. "Don't say that. Goria is doomed, yes. Nero will not be here tomorrow, and the town will be buried beneath this black boiling hell. But we might survive, if we but stay here. We might survive to seek out Nero on another day."

Tiberius coughed again, pointing a thin hand at the ceiling of the cavern above them.

"Those cracks," he husked, "tell me that it is over."

Vintius looked up, saw the gaping rents in the stone above growing wider. His face paled. But like the older man at his feet, he, too, could meet death with eyes that showed no fear.

"You are right," Vintius whispered hoarsely. "We are doomed, and Goria too." He coughed in the smoke. "It will be the task of others than ourselves to eliminate the tryant. Some day, perhaps."

"Some day, perhaps," Tiberius agreed weakly. And then he closed his

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

eyes. Seconds later the huge stone ceiling of the cavern crashed down, crushing all life within it . . .

* * *

The following is a transcription taken from the on-the-scene pickup of the now historic happenings at the gigantic anti-V demonstration in Vichy, France, Friday, April 10th, 1942. It is recorded only in part—

ANNOUNCER: For almost an hour, now, the crowds have been lined along the great wide thoroughfare, awaiting the beginning of the parade. The triumphal arch, donated to the ceremonies by Benito Mussolini, is right down below my vantage point from the hotel roof. "V" pennants are draped everywhere around, and the arch itself is symbolically full of "Vees." I can read the 'Veni, vidi, vici!' inscription from here.

(*Sudden Martial Music Is Heard in Background*)

ANNOUNCER: (EXCITEDLY) There's the band, a military band, starting the strains of triumphal music that will begin the parade! And yes, far down to my right I can see the famous column of Hitler Guards, Der Fuehrer's own personal regiment, helmets and bayonets gleaming in the sun. Yes, they're marching down the thoroughfare, now, goose-stepping in precision, heading toward the triumphal archway. Just directly behind them, I am told, will be the big limousine in which Adolf Hitler will be riding, about ten yards behind, an observer just told me.

(*Martial Music Grows Louder*)

ANNOUNCER: (MORE EXCITMENT) I can look right down on the parade, now. And I see the limousine in which the German Leader stands, one arm raised to the crowds grouped along the sides of the street. Yes, he's just about ten yards behind his personal regiment. And behind Hitler's car, of course, is much, much, more of the parade. But all eyes are fixed on the personal guard and Der Fuehrer, of course.

The first lines of the famed personal guards of the Nazi Leader are now goose-stepping under the huge, old archway. The thrub-thrub-thrub of their steps is plainly audible, even up here. Maybe it's an echo caught in a sort of sound box under the archway. Line-after-line, there they go, thumping under the arch and down the shining street. The steady rhythm of their marching is absolutely uninterrupted.

And now, for just a moment, it grows fainter as the last line of the Hitler Guard steps through and out of the archway. Der Fuehrer's limousine is right under the archway, now, and the echo of the high-powered motor can almost be heard. It's—

(*Tremendous crashing noise blends with band and crowd*)

ANNOUNCER: (HYSTERICALLY) The arch! My God in heaven, the arch—

LEAVE IT TO THE LIZARDS

TRUTH is stranger than fiction. Yes, stranger even than the brand of fiction in which Our Hero gets himself into any absolutely impossible jam and escapes by "leaping from the bottomless pit in one mighty leap." If you don't believe it, take the escape devices of certain species of lizards.

It seems that many lizards, when pursued by unfriendly denizens of nature or threatened by other great danger, have a foolproof escape mechanism that enables them to elude said pursuers and dangers with remarkable cunning and astonishing ease. Using a special set of muscles, the frightened lizard performs what amounts to an automatic tail amputation, shedding that part of the anatomy and leaving it behind him.

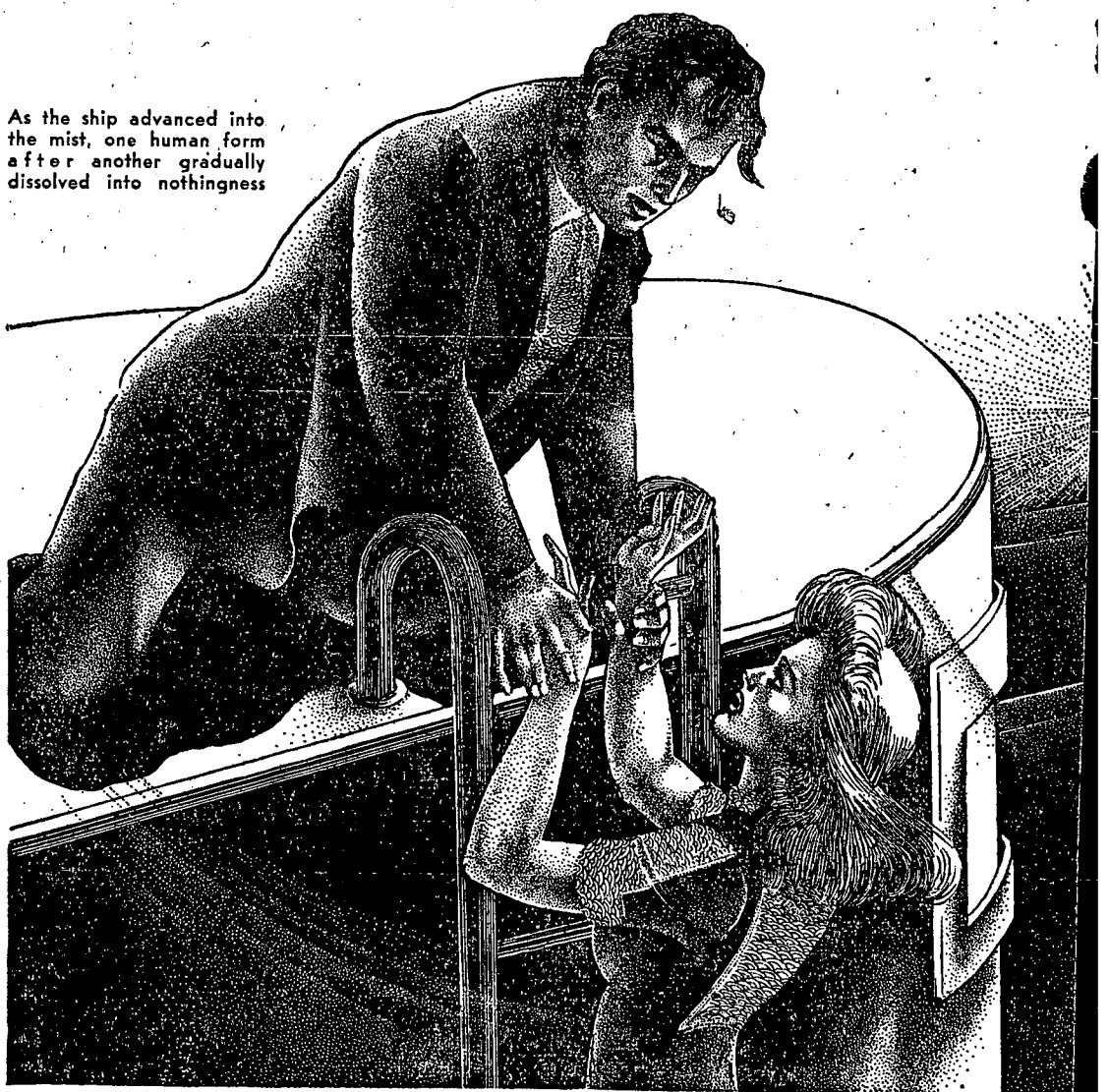
The pursuer stops, investigates the loudly colored and wriggling tail, and the lizard gets time to make his escape. A little later the clever lizard grows a new tail!

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Rainbow of Death

by DON WILCOX

This was a pleasure resort, but that mist out on the lake wasn't pleasant. Something mysterious went on in it—something deadly



As the ship advanced into the mist, one human form after another gradually dissolved into nothingness

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

DEEP in the lavender mists that fill the caverns within the earth, the nine hundred and ninety-nine Servants of Death are laboring, even as they have labored through all of the earth's past and will continue to labor for an eternity of future time to come.

Each stroke of their phantom hands erases a name.

Through the subterranean lavender forests, where names of the earth's living creatures appear like foliations in the bark of living trees, these Servants of Death move to and fro, performing their services. At this hour, this minute, and this second, they are distributing their death strokes. With infinite care they choose. They work according to their own esoteric formulas that have been in operation since human life began.

Death, indeed, is their service to mankind.

Perhaps man, in his thoughtlessness or lack of understanding, often fails to appreciate the work of his nine hundred and ninety-nine Servants of Death. But

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

whether they be praised or censured, they continue to walk the misty paths of their hidden world, performing their indispensable function.

The process of choosing is so very intricate that man can only speak of it as Fate, something blind, devoid of logic. Sometimes even the Servants of Death themselves have momentary confusions over a choice, so that nine of them must take counsel over a name before it can be erased.

It is not for man to understand the ways of this hidden world.

The myriad trunks and branches of the lavender forest lift high through the opaque lavender mists, up toward the earth's crusts. These subterranean tree-like columns are, in fact, the deepest roots of the earth's life and death. They are not things of wood, nor of stone, but of some unknown materials as strong, as plastic, as organically responsive to stimulations as the most wonderful protoplasm that civilized man's microscope has ever seen.

Let the earth's crust tremble with the thunder of man's hatreds, his loves, his laughter. The vibrations filter down to these dynamic roots of life and death, to register man's ultimate fate.

Never is there a shortage of activity in this unknown realm. For new names continually appear upon the lavender columns. The lists are always long, no matter how swiftly the phantom hands may work.

It is natural that the Servants of Death should speak the tongues of modern man; they also sometimes employ languages from past ages. Their forms of writing, too, are a strange mingling of modern and archaic.

But these are only a few of the observations that any living man, if privileged to visit this mysterious underground region, would find intriguing. Undoubtedly such a visitor would be fascinated by the discussions of those nine Servants counselling over a debatable name. . . .

"THE name Londotte is still waiting for a decision."

"We shelved it before because it was interlocked with two others—a granddaughter and her friend."

"Shall we take all three? Londotte is well past his time."

"The other two are quite young. They aren't at all ready."

"Most people aren't."

"This is a case of a close attachment between a girl and her grandfather. Unfortunately, some action must be taken."

"Yes, his body is past serving him."

"Suppose we take both—what of the third?"

"The third is a young man—the girl's friend. It wouldn't be easy to separate him from the others."

"Perhaps the young man could save the girl from the grandfather's fate."

"He hasn't the strength to draw her away. Only the strength to follow along."

"He's very talented. His talent depends upon an audience."

"The hosts of death would furnish him an audience."

"Then shall we take all three?"

The nine Servants were interrupted in their discussion by a communication that filtered down through the lavender columns. Someone was seeking admission at the door, miles above them, where one of the misty caverns made contact with the earth's surface.

"I'll go up," said one of the Servants of Death. "The caller is probably some innocent, looking for employment. Our agents on the surface are trying to secure a few more living workers who will make an effort to understand our policy."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"We had best postpone our decision on these three names," said another. "I suggest we delay action for a fortnight."

CHAPTER II

ALL along the decks of the pleasure cruiser *Sunny Wave* there were couples like Barbara and her boy friend, chasing, laughing, singing, spooning, watching the waves. The travel circulars had boasted that this was the merriest holiday excursion in the world, and the boast was justified.

Even old Judge Londotte, Barbara's pompous, aged grandfather, had forgotten most of his pet grouches for the moment. He had hired a boy to push him around the decks in a wheel chair, and the boy responded to his growl so obediently that the aged man was almost happy. He was never completely happy except when Barbara was pampering him.

Just now she was off with her boy friend, probably listening to music. Her boy friend was a music addict. That was one of Judge Londotte's pet grouches.

This afternoon the dance orchestra aboard the *Sunny Wave* was holding a free-for-all for the amateur musicians aboard. So Larry LeBrac—Barbara's Larry—was right up on the stage vocalizing. It gave the girl such a thrill, the way Larry's voice magnetized the listeners, that she hurried down the deck to find her grandfather. He must hear, too.

She rounded a corner and bumped squarely into someone—she was too breathless to notice whom—until he helped her to her feet and said, with an amused smile, "Not so fast, there, young lady."

"I'm sorry."

"If there isn't a speed limit on these decks I'll speak to the captain. And I'll have him rig up a special stop light for you."

"Excuse me, I—" Barbara was slightly embarrassed. She had knocked a small, brightly bound booklet out of the young man's hands. She started to pick it up. He bent down at the same time and their hands touched it simultaneously. It was an elaborately engraved little volume, bound in purple leather.

"Allow me," said the young man, grinning broadly. "This book is very private—"

"What lovely lettering!" The book was in Barbara's hands, and she was at once fascinated. "Those little gold characters are Sumerian, aren't they?"

"Why, I—I don't know."

"But of course they are. I've studied all about it. Sumerian is one of the oldest written languages. This book must be very valuable—"

"Not quite so close to the rail, please, Miss—"

"Londotte—Barbara Londotte."

"I'm Wayne Early."

BARBARA acknowledged the introduction with a half-interested, "How-do-you-do, Mr. Early," and returned her attentions to the esoteric reading matter on the purple cover.

"I can't understand," she said, "why you should be carrying a book with Sumerian characters on it if you don't know how to read them."

"Well, it's a long story. If you care to have dinner with me—"

"I couldn't think of it, thank you, Mr. —Mr.—"

"Early is the name. I'm usually greeted by some wisecrack about being the early bird that gets the worm. But you've spared me. At least you're different."

"I can't think what you'd want with

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a worm," said Barbara, appraising the young man's neat appearance casually. Even with his hair blowing raggedly in the stiff breeze, he had the well-groomed look of the English post-war college student. But his speech was clearly American.

"My book, Miss Londotte," said Wayne Early, breaking her momentary gaze.

"Is it all in Sumerian? . . . Why, the inside is English. That's strange."

"Just a list of names—"

"Judge Henry R. Londotte! That's my grandfather. And here's my name, too. And Larry LeBrac. You've got question marks after Larry and me. What's this all about, Mr. Early? Are you working some kind of racket?"

The young man smiled blandly as her dark eyes turned on him, sharp and accusing. "I must have priced tickets with your grandfather for an excursion ride—the Rainbow Excursion. You see, I've taken a job as an agent—"

"Grandfather didn't tell me—gracious, I forgot all about grandfather. He'll be looking for me—and Larry, too. I'd better go. Here's your book, Mr. Early."

"You're sure you won't have dinner with me?"

The girl shook her head. "When a girl's got an aged grandfather to look after, not to mention a—a friend—"

"Some other time, then?"

"I—I don't know." She started to hurry on. She rounded the corner, then a strange thought stopped her. She whirled, ran back, bumped squarely into the same young man at the same corner.

She fell, though Wayne Early did his best to catch her.

"So you were following me," she said angrily as he tried to help her to her feet.

"I wasn't, but I—" He hesitated, puzzled by her sudden change of mood.

"Well, don't. That's what I came back to tell you." Her eyes blazed with a mysterious fury.

"You don't have to warn me, Miss Londotte. I'm no football man. Two spills of this kind are enough. But what upset you? I mean—"

"That book—"

"Where the hell—" Wayne Early grabbed at his pockets, but at that instant he saw, and Barbara saw, where the book had gone. In the spill it had slid to the very edge of the deck, barely balanced.

The next wave struck the ship, the book bounced over and was gone.

Or would have been, if Wayne Early hadn't plunged right over the deck after it.

BARBARA chased into the ship's offices spreading the alarm, the whistles blew, the boat lurched, music and dancing and card parties came to a rude stop, everyone scurried out to the decks to see the lifeboat lowered to pick up the man overboard.

Ten minutes after the excitement was over, Wayne Early, clad in dry clothes, emerged from his stateroom to find Barbara waiting outside the door.

"Well here we are again," he smiled. "Suppose you finish what you started to tell me."

"You're not to speak to me again, Mr. Early, until you're ready to come clean about that book." Her voice strained in an effort to be severe. "Grandfather and Larry and I have come for a carefree vacation, and I'm not going to have it marred by—"

"What in the devil are you talking about?"

"I don't know what your game is, but you've got our names in your book—"

"For tickets—"

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Tickets! I've just recalled the Sumerian characters, Mr. Early. I know the title of that book."

"What it is? . . . Tell me . . . I swear I don't know."

His evident sincerity did not temper Barbara's venom.

"The title is *Book of Death,*" she said icily. "Until you can explain that, you needn't speak to me again."

CHAPTER III

SO THIS was Congo Gardens!—gala, happy, carefree Africa!—the newest, brightest, most popular playground of the new merry age! As Paris, half a century before, had been the earth's mecca of merriment, so Congo Gardens was becoming, in this new age, the festival city of all civilization.

Sparkling confetti was showering down over the pier as the *Sunny Wave* landed. An orchestra rang through loud speakers. Barbara caught her breath with excitement.

"How do you like it, Granddaddy?"

"Where's a restaurant?" said the old man. "It's time for my bowl of bread and milk."

"Why grandaddy, shame on you. With all this merriment."

Together Barbara and her boy friend helped the old man down the gangplank. He bore heavily upon his silver headed cane, and he was annoyed by Larry LeBrac's interfering with that arm. He was a man of great bulk, and his muscles weren't equal to the task of walking down a gangplank. His face showed the torture he was undergoing. His flabby cheeks sagged, one of his eyelids dropped shut with every jogging step like something on a loose hinge.

"Keep your eyes open for a restaurant," Judge Londotte repeated as the threesome plodded along. "A good restaurant. No more of that watery milk like we had on the ship. If I can't get a good bowl of bread and milk in this place, we'll go right back to America."

"Now don't start worrying, Granddaddy. You were the one that wanted this trip—"

"Barbara, do you hear that orchestra?" Larry LeBrac was prancing like a high-strung horse.

"It's an American orchestra, isn't it?" Barbara asked.

"You know it—they're doing the Dream of Carniola—the smash of the hour!"

Judge Londotte growled bitterly, "My bowl of bread and milk, Barbara."

"I heard you, Granddaddy."

"Why does he have to interrupt me?"

Barbara pacified him by loading him into a taxi. The party sped away to a hotel. It turned out to be quite an expensive hotel, and Judge Londotte had trouble with the clerk. Tomorrow, he said, he'd find a decent place at decent prices.

Barbara didn't go out that night. The old man was too tired to move a step, and he mumbled in hurt tones when she talked of exploring the bright lights with Larry. So she blissfully sat by the radio, to be sharing the orchestra that Larry had gone to hear, but turned it low so the Judge was spared. He had had all the gayety he could stand for one night . . .

BARBARA LONDOTTE'S parting words had left Wayne Early stinging.

All night he puzzled over the matter, retracing in his mind the chain of events that had led him to take this job. The following day he browsed through the carnival town looking for an interpreter of the Sumerian and finding none.

He thought of flying to Cairo, Egypt, where, in accordance with the sugges-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tion of a friend of a friend, he had secured this mysterious job a few days before. But this course seemed unwise. He might not get back in time to conduct his first Rainbow Excursion, four nights hence. And he was reluctant to bother his superiors with trifling complaints.

However, the following day he received a telegram announcing that a company official would stop over in Congo Gardens that night.

Wayne's interview with the official that rainy evening finally led up to a blunt question. Was there a racket back of these Rainbow Excursions? What was the game?

"That's a hell of a question," the official said evasively. "You're getting your money, aren't you? . . . Then why worry? The other agents on the job seem to like it."

"Okay. I'll like it, I guess."

"Haven't you even taken a boat load over yet?"

"First one is three nights off," said Wayne.

"Don't let it bother you. Just check your tickets and you'll be all right. Your instinct will tell you what to do."

There wasn't a thing about the official's manner to cause suspicion and when Wayne boiled it down the only source of his worries had been a girl's funny notions about the ancient language insignia. Wayne therewith resolved to forget the whole business—all except the girl. He didn't want to forget her.

Not until two evenings later did Wayne make contact with the Londotte party. Then it was not Barbara that he found, but the huge decrepit old man, cruising along under the colored lights of the fairway in a taxi.

"Judge Londotte!" Wayne called from his sightseeing rickshaw.

"Huh? Stop this blasted taxi, boy. Someone called me." The old man craned falteringly toward the rickshaw. He batted his eyes blankly, his flabby face shuddered.

Wayne stepped up and made himself known. He was the agent who had sold Judge Londotte three tickets for the Rainbow Excursion. The aged man finally remembered, and grudgingly accepted the young fellow's handsome handshake.

"Of course you're having a fine time, Mr. Londotte? How are you feeling?"

"I'm feeling rotten—but why should I tell you?"

"Anything I can do? Always glad to be of service."

"Double damn it, I've been over these grounds twice trying to find my granddaughter. She ran off and left me in that rat hole of a restaurant. Left me by myself, an old man like me."

"Never mind," Wayne said cheerily. "She's probably having the time of her young life—she and her musical Romeo. I wouldn't disturb her—"

"She can't do this to me. She knew I wanted to move to a cheaper hotel tonight. She's got no business leaving me stranded with the baggage. I'll tell her so, too, the minute I find her." The Judge rapped his silver-headed cane on the taxi door.

"If you insist on hunting her down," said Wayne, "let me help you. You'll get around much better in a rickshaw."

IT WAS nothing short of a fight to make the fuming old gentleman leave his taxi, but at last they were moving along the glittering walks side by side in two rickshaws.

"Does your granddaughter have any chance to enjoy herself?" Wayne asked.

The old man answered with a snarl and a grunt.

"Too bad," said Wayne. "She's a lovely girl—oh, yes, I've met her. She

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

rather fell for me on board the *Sunny Wave.*"

"Gr-r-r." The massive old man trembled.

"I can't remember meeting a peachier girl than Barbara Londotte," Wayne continued. "I don't suppose she comes to Congo Gardens often. While she's here you ought to let her have the time of her life."

"What about *me?*"

"She's been here four nights, now, hasn't she?"

"I say, what about *me?*"

"Maybe she *is* having the time of her life. For her sake, I hope so."

"Double damn it, I'm entitled to some consideration. You said you were going to find her. Well, get the hell busy."

Wayne turned to the boys who were pushing the rickshaws. "Ride us to all the best music spots in Congo Gardens." . . .

CARRIED away by the strains of an exotic melody—a new smash, as Larry LeBrac called it—Barbara Londotte was at last having an evening of enjoyment.

She had hated to run off from her grandfather, but his growl had become unbearable. Beside, the days were slipping away and she hadn't had a taste of carnival fun yet. The first three nights had been utterly ruined.

On the night they had arrived she had stayed with her grandfather, and Larry had gone out alone.

The second evening it had rained, and Judge Londotte had scolded and fretted because they were still living in the expensive hotel. And Larry had gone berserk with a frenzy of composing and had spent half the night banging out snatches of weird melody on the piano in one of the hotel parlors—until the management had to put a stop to it.

Then last night, just as Barbara and Larry were setting out for a night of music and dancing, some dreadful publisher's agent had caught Larry at the hotel door and asked to hear his musical composition. So they had gone back to the piano, just to run over the number once.

But that had turned out to be only the beginning. They spent an hour at the piano, while Barbara sat back in her new silver evening dress and dancing pumps and red Spanish shawl, waiting, doing her best to be charming. Then the publisher's agent insisted upon drinks, and he and Larry got tight and began to argue.

They had to scare up a phonograph and some records to settle the argument. They played one horrible record over not less than twenty-five times, trying to determine whether the bassoon solo depicted the comedy of life or the tragedy of death. And when the publisher's agent, after two more drinks, declared belligerently that it depicted the *comedy of death,* Larry wanted to fight.

So in the end the evening came to utter ruin. The publisher's agent even admitted, finally, that he had no authority to buy Larry's song. Barbara was utterly depressed.

Consequently, Barbara was breathing with relief this evening. For once, she'd gotten away from grandfathers and publisher's agents and quarrels and bickering. Larry was thoroughly enjoying himself, and to Barbara that meant everything. It was when he was in these hyper-romantic moods, stirred by a good orchestra, that Barbara felt the glow of his ardor most keenly.

"Barbara," he was half-whispering, "what you just said about that music—it shows how deeply you feel the things I feel. That music is me, Barbara, the very soul of me. You enter into it like no one else can."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"The Congo Gardens have carried you away," Barbara teased. "You're talking thin air."

He brushed his lips against her forehead as they danced.

"Listen! They're going into that new smash. I could sing that one like nobody's business—especially if you'd sit right over there and toss me a smile on every third note."

"Go ahead, basso profundo," Barbara said. "The lid's off. Sing it!"

LARRY believed in obeying every musical impulse. He mounted the orchestra platform, adjusted the microphone, and raised an eyebrow toward the leader who hold him to "take it away." The orchestra was with him, and so was the crowd, from the first note. And how he sang! Barbara caught her breath. This was glamour to write home about.

If her smile had anything to do with Larry's singing, it was no wonder he was putting the song over big—

But the chorus broke off unfinished. A guttural voice cut into the music and everyone turned to see what was the matter. Some of the crowd shrank back as though expecting a police raid. Or a bandit hold-up.

The roar, however, was a familiar one to Barbara Londotte. She turned to see her grandfather riding across the floor in a rickshaw.

"Right over to the orchestra!" The old man growled to the boy who was pushing him. "I've had enough of this nonsense. There. Stop that damned music. Come down from there, you. Where's my granddaughter?"

Larry LeBrac moved down from the platform, crestfallen, helpless.

"Wait, Granddaddy," Barbara cried, elbowing through to the rickshaw. "Don't break up the song—"

"Song! Song! Come here, both of you. I've been searching the grounds for two hours, damn it."

The orchestra had come to a limping stop. The listeners were grumbling protests. Some people ought to be confined in cells, they said, to keep the peace. Judge Londotte silenced all murmurs with an ugly snarl.

"Granddaddy," Barbara gasped. "You're spoiling everything."

"Shut up. Who's paying for this trip? I am. I'm entitled to some consideration. You ought to be ashamed, running off with this frog-voiced monkey."

"Granddaddy, please. You're embarrassing me to tears."

"I told you, Barbara, double damn it, we've got to move tonight. We're through with that highway robber joint they call a hotel. Come on, you—"

But Barbara had already fled. Larry, burned up with humiliation, was torn between following after her and waiting for the irate old man. The crowd's stares imprisoned him and he waited.

Barbara had walked out the first exit as fast as she could go. She crossed under the floodlights of a parkway, dodged a shower of confetti, tried to lose herself in the moving throngs.

Suddenly her way was blocked by a rickshaw, and a voice that she certainly knew called, "Watch the stop lights, Miss Londotte. Don't crash into me."

"Oh—it's you."

"Early is the name." Wayne stepped out of the rickshaw and made a deep bow. "My chariot, Miss, at your service. Your grandfather and I have been looking for you. I think he went over to the dance pavilion—pardon me, but did I say the wrong thing?"

"Nothing you might say could make the least difference."

"Well, well, well." Wayne cocked his head. "Quite a cold spell we're having here in the tropics, isn't it, Miss Lon-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

dotte? I fell as if I've been hung in the refrigeration room for the season."

"If you'll step aside, please—"

"One moment, my friend," said Wayne Early. "If nothing I say can make any difference, I may as well say it."

"Well?"

"You're not having any fun. You haven't had a minute to enjoy yourself since you came. Your grandfather told me."

"*He* told you?"

"Unintentionally, of course. I can see how true it is. A charming kid like you ought to get away from your responsibilities. I'll appoint myself a committee of one to see that you do it."

"Oh—I—no, I mustn't—"

Wayne discarded her protests in favor of the strong gleam of interest in her dark eyes. He turned abruptly to the rickshaw boy, handed him a bill.

"I'm renting this go-cart for the rest of the evening," he said. He helped Barbara into it and wheeled her off to see the sights.

CHAPTER IV

IT WAS the fifth night, and at last, thought Barbara, the Londotte trio had got the carnival spirit. They had all three bought costumes for the masquerade street dance. They would dance until after midnight. Then, at the bewitching hour of two in the morning, they would gather at the Rainbow Lake pier for the second event of the night, the long promised scenic excursion.

These plans, for once, had suited both Larry and Judge Londotte. Larry had assured himself that there would be interesting music at both events, and that was enough to account for his eagerness.

The grandfather, while not admitting any anticipation of pleasure, withheld some of his usual grumbling. Barbara's walkout of the previous evening had perhaps been a lesson to him. She had come home late and had summarily announced that she had had too wonderful a time to do any apologizing to anyone.

That was strange behavior for Barbara, and Larry had expected the old man to blow up.

The old man didn't. Perhaps he was too exhausted. Perhaps he was leaving the blowing-up to Larry. The matter of getting moved to cheaper quarters was the chief burden on the grandfather's mind; and by afternoon of this day that matter was taken care of.

They had moved into a private home far out in one of the Congo Garden suburbs, a residential section that was out from under the expensive police regulations of the main city.

Barbara wasn't at all satisfied with the new living quarters. The little old landlady told so many stories about the disappearance of some of her tenants that it gave Barbara the creeps. There was a whole room full of suitcases and trunks that had been left, mostly by aged people, the little old lady said, and she was worried to death about them. But if the owners didn't come back and finish paying their rent one of these days she was going to sell them.

"She's crazy," was Larry's comment. "She's probably got suitcase-omania or something. We'd better watch our baggage."

Barbara was glad to get out of the house and back to the midway. With a dawn excursion on schedule, they wouldn't return to their rooms until sometime the next forenoon, thank goodness.

Now Barbara finished putting on her Joan of Arc masquerade costume and hurried out of the public dressing room to the nearby pavilion where she was to

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

meet her grandfather and Larry.

She had to fight her way through the crisscrossing throngs. Already the glittering streamer confetti was spiralling down from silver confetti clouds all over the street. Floats were parading past, people were yodeling, blowing horns, pounding tambourines.

Some masked person in a cricket costume seemed to be waving at Barbara from across the pavilion, but she was wary. She slid through the racing, chasing crowd and the cricket lost himself in the other direction.

Then a masterful king of beasts was making his way toward her, shaking his lion's mane comically.

That would be Larry. She had bought the costumes herself only a few minutes before—a lion for Larry, an elephant for her grandfather.

"Take me out of this mob," Barbara gasped as the masked figure caught her by the hand. "Ten thousand people must have made this pavilion their meeting place. Let's get out into the street where they're dancing."

The king of beasts looked about questioningly.

"Grandfather will wait right here," Barbara said. "We've got to start the evening off dancing. Come on. Give a lion's roar before this mob crushes my ribs to powder. . . . Why don't you say something, Larry?"

THE king of beasts had been drawing her through the crowds too swiftly for words, but now that they were lost in the sea of dancers he answered.

"Gr-r-r. I'm not Larry."

"Wayne Early!"

"I can see you're surprised but not at all indignant."

"I *am* indignant. This is preposterous! It's—"

She might have saved her words, for the king of beasts roared down her protests. She threatened to tear his mask off his head, but when she got it half off and saw him laughing fit to kill, she lost all her anger, and with it her battle. What had he done that was so funny, she demanded to know.

He led her out of the din into the comparative quiet of a little Danish coffee shop where they could talk.

"Did someone in a cricket outfit try to intercept you?" he asked. "Well, that was Larry. We traded. That cricket get-up is what the dance band at the Blue Canopy is wearing, and he saw his chance to crash the band. I warned him when we traded that you'd fall to me, but I agreed to give him a three minute head-start."

Barbara shook her head with a comically deprecating expression. She pursed her Joan-of-Arc lips to hold back her laughter. "Grandfather'll be stranded again. He'll have apoplexy."

"He wasn't alone when I saw him last."

"What do you mean? . . . Oh, another scheme?"

"Well, you might call it that. I tagged a little sign on the back of his elephant coat that read: *I dare you to marry me for my money.* The last glimpse I had of the old gentleman there were five assorted females giving him some lively chatter, such as making unsubtle cracks about his elephant's trunk."

"Wayne! Shame on you! Grandfather hasn't the slightest interest in women."

Wayne shrugged. He wouldn't know. All he contended was that the old gentleman wouldn't get lonesome. By that time Barbara's laughter was overflowing all the dams. She was Joan of Arc, the youthful fun-loving girl, and the weight of the war had temporarily slipped off her shoulders.

They danced the evening away.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

At midnight there were bells and whistles and gongs in accompaniment to the unmasking. The ritual called for a kiss between couples. Barbara and Wayne had known each other not quite a week and they couldn't think of violating a Congo Gardens ritual.

So they kissed at midnight, and the merry night grew merrier.

AT ONE o'clock they caught sight of Judge Londotte sitting on a crowded bench under the colored midway lights. They came up behind him close enough to hear his talk above the din. He was streaming with perspiration, but he was obviously enjoying himself. The multicolored parkway lights softened the fatigue lines of his face and gave his gray complexion a ruddiness. Of the assorted middle-aged females who made up his audience, one was politely fanning him with an expensive celluloid fan.

"When I bought the ticket," the old man was puffing, "I was told that the Rainbow Excursion is a very exclusive trip. I only wish I had known you ladies. I'd have made reservations for all of you. Huh-huh-huh."

Barbara touched Wayne's arm and whispered, "Let's leave him alone. He hasn't come that near to laughing in years."

At one-thirty she and Wayne dropped into the Yellow Dragon's Mouth and secluded themselves in a booth so tiny that they crossed straws while sipping their drinks. The night's gayety was already quieting. A curious bit of conversation reached them from the next booth. A Brazilian with a keen intelligent face was chatting with his North American girl friend, talking about some friends who had done service in a war.

"The closer to death they came, the swifter they lived," said the Brazilian. "Never did you see such mad, gay fellows as they. They would gamble or fight or marry at the drop of a hat. So mad, so gay!"

"Why, should you be thinking of them?" the girl asked.

"Oh, but this mad, gay carnival. Wherever people come together to live so swiftly—Paris, Rio, Congo Gardens—I always think it must be because they feel death swooping close . . . But of course it is close, always. That's why I'm a mad, gay fellow myself."

Barbara's eyes lifted to Wayne's. He had been drinking in every word. She whispered to him.

"Are you a mad, gay fellow?"

"What do you think?"

"You've been wonderfully gay—" Barbara was smiling, but a touch of fierceness came into her Joan of Arc eyes. "I think you're mad, too."

"Why?"

"I haven't forgot that you carry a Book of Death."

"Oh, that." Wayne laughed lightly. "I checked matters with one of my superior officers. I don't think there's anything to worry about. I'll transfer my names to another book if it would be any comfort to you—"

"It isn't necessary."

"Would you rather not see the Rainbow?"

"I'll go," said Barbara. "Grandfather might need me. I hope he won't get seasick or anything. Does the lake ever get rough?"

"I wouldn't know," said Wayne. "I've never been on it." He glanced at his watch. "We'd better take a taxi."

CHAPTER V

AT TWO-THIRTY, the long, lithe excursion boat slid away from the pier.

Barbara kept looking back at the

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

colored lights.

"Let him go," Judge Londotte growled. "If he can't keep an appointment he deserves to get left."

"I hope he's hearing some good music." Barbara tried to suppress her disappointment. She felt guilty over being away from Larry all evening. She had intended to make up for it on this Rainbow Excursion. But Larry hadn't come.

Was he angry over Wayne Early's trading costumes? Did he think she had intentionally slipped away from him when he had waved his cricket arms at her? The pangs of conscience burned sharply.

Now the winding course of the inlet pushed black jungle-covered hills across the ship's wake, screening the last of the distant lights of Congo Gardens.

"Forget about him," Judge Londotte repeated hoarsely. "I tell you he deserves to get left."

A curious fear struck at Barbara's heart—a chaotic fear that was partly loneliness, partly guilt, partly dread of the unknown. The boat was gliding out toward a velvety blue expanse of lake. This was no longer Congo Gardens. Far from being a well-known attraction, Rainbow Lake was a fresh, raw, unexplored stretch of jungle whose miles of mystic waters boasted only this one new excursion line.

"We'd better get a place up front, John," said an old lady passenger to her white-haired husband, "so we can get a good view of the Rainbow."

"Think it'll be as perty as the one we spooned by, sixty-five years ago, Dolly?"

"I hope so. This is such a lovely trip. Did you notice the nice young man that took our tickets?"

"He's the same lad I bought 'em from, Dolly," said the white-haired old man.

The couple passed out of hearing.

Barbara glanced around wondering whether Wayne would come back to her after he finished checking his passengers. She half hoped he wouldn't, now that her deepest loyalties to Larry LeBrac were torturing her.

Those kisses that had passed between her and Wayne couldn't mean anything. In a few days all this carnival would be over for her, and everything would be just as it was before—her old boy friend hungering for her praise to bolster his musical genius—her grandfather ordering her about—

"Barbara, why don't you answer me? Do I have to speak six times to get an answer?"

"I'm sorry, Granddaddy. I must have been lost in the scenery or something."

"What about my bowl of bread and milk?"

"Why, I hadn't thought about it."

"Why hadn't you? Who's supposed to think about those things, me or you? I'll bet there won't be a thing fit to eat here on shipboard."

Yes, thought Barbara with a little sigh, soon everything would be just as it was before—

"Double damn it, can't you see I need help buttoning my shirt?"

"One thing at a time, Granddaddy," she said patiently. "Which will it be, your shirt or your bowl of bread and milk?"

"My shirt, damn it. How'd I get in this mess?"

"Changing out of your elephant costume, probably."

IN THE near darkness that pervaded on the boat's decks Barbara hadn't noticed the sad disarray of the judge's clothing. She had rather been struck by the unusually pallid glow of his flabby face, half-luminous through the

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

steamy night air.

"You'll never get me in another elephant suit," the old man growled bitterly.

"Troubles, friends?" came the hearty voice of Wayne Early, striding toward them. "Wouldn't your grandfather like to come into one of the staterooms, Barbara, where there's more light?"

"I would not!" Judge Londotte snapped, his arms shuddering with anger.

"Also a cot if you care to rest."

"Who wants to rest? I'm not tired."

"It'll be more than an hour before the first light of dawn," said Wayne. "I'm reserving the staterooms for the elderly passengers—"

"I'm not old!" Judge Londotte beat his silver-headed cane against the ship's rail. "You don't dare call me old."

Cursing and muttering, he stormed away alone.

Barbara knew he expected her to follow. Incidents like these put her resources to a test, since nothing less than her comforting and babying would restore the old gentleman's outraged feelings. She turned her back on Wayne Early and followed her grandfather around the ship's promenade . . .

WITH the light of dawn a rainbow came into view over the western waters.

The impatient sightseers muttered with disappointment. The rainbow was too vague, too colorless to match their expectations.

But as soon as the morning's sunrays glinted across the length of the ship, the spectrum-filled mists ignited with dazzling light. Within the first rainbow a second one appeared, close down upon the waters, as bright and luminous as a crown of jewels.

A thrill of magic excitement surged through the crowd. Even those aged and decrepit ones who considered themselves past thrilling to nature's wonders —and there was, curiously, a preponderance of such aboard—added their full share to the gasps and murmurs of amazement.

"By heavens, I thought I'd seen everything," said one tottering old world-traveler, whose hard-lined face was a map of misspent years. "But this hits a new high."

"I hope we move closer," said a sad-eyed little old woman.

Much to everyone's high delight, the ship was drifting straight toward the rainbow. A slow but compelling current was carrying it along. The engines were no longer humming.

In fact, the pilot and crew had departed by rowboats soon after navigating the ship into mid-lake.

Wayne Early had watched them go. Indeed, they had urged him to go with them. "The work's all done," they had said. "From this point on, the boat drifts through and returns to the pier by the action of currents. Jump in with us."

"I'm seeing my passengers through," Wayne had replied. "See you later."

"There's a small rowboat on the rear of the ship when you change your mind."

Not *if*, but *when*. Their talk had left Wayne on nerve's edge.

Drinks, labelled and unlabelled, were free on the ship. The drinking spree that had been in progress from the start had reached the saturation point with several of the passengers. But the hard-faced old world-traveler took it upon himself to pass drinks again and demanded that nothing less than a drinking ritual would do justice to the glory of this, the eighth wonder of the world —yes, and the ninth, tenth, eleventh— he squandered numbers and liquors in his drunken rhapsody.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The sad-eyed little old woman passed up the drinks, but when someone else insisted that everybody dance to the rainbow, she joined in. Giddily, crazily, the sightseers turned themselves into grotesque merry-makers.

Wayne couldn't understand the suddenness with which this party went mad and gay. He couldn't realize that these relics of better years were, by some caprice of nature, being relieved of the aches and pains of old age for a last dance of life.

IT WAS by far the most monstrous dance Wayne ever saw. He wondered if Barbara was dancing. He hoped not. But she had walked off so haughtily that he didn't intend to follow.

"Wayne, take me out of this!" Barbara came running down the deck to him. "It's too horrid. I don't want to dance with these old men. They won't let me alone—and they're all crazy from drinking."

"Come on," said Wayne, "we'll get back in a corner."

There was a regular ring around the rosy, now. The dancers were going round and round the decks, tottering, staggering, whooping.

Old Judge Londotte came shuffling along, yelling, "Barbara, Barbara, don't you dare run off from me! Where are you?"

"He'll find me here," Barbara whispered. "I'd better go to him. He mustn't think—"

"Wait. Come this way. I know just the thing."

They chased to the rear of the ship. They got into the rowboat, they let it down to the surface, unhitched it from its ropes, and pushed away.

"We'll have our own rainbow excursion until they get over acting like maniacs."

"Rocks ahead!" Barbara gasped.

Wayne glanced around but saw nothing.

"Under the water," said Barbara. "Right under the rainbow—and the ship's drifting straight toward them. They're—they're beautiful!"

"Not dangerous, then?"

"I—I don't know."

Barbara's breathlessness was baffling to Wayne. She kept gasping incoherently about the beauty of the rainbow, the strangeness of the mists coming up from the ridge of rock.

He heaved at the oars, pulled far out of the wake of the ship, which was drifting so slowly it was almost motionless. As the rowboat turned so that Wayne faced the rainbow scene, he dropped his oars and gazed.

The vast arch of color hovered in the air only a few yards beyond the prow of the ship. Strange to say, it was even more intense at this close range than it had been from a distance.

"It's too bright. It hurts my eyes," said Barbara, turning her head away.

"I see it now. A screen of mist sprays up out of that rock ridge," said Wayne. "A sort of *gaseous* mist."

Obviously, the jagged backbone of brown rock, which rose almost to the surface of the clear golden waters, was the source of the rainbow. It cast its misty breath skyward like some vast sea monster eternally exhaling its poisonous rainbow-colored breath.

Now the prow of the excursion boat was creeping over the submerged rock, nosing into the rainbow mists.

Wayne's eyes suddenly grew wide. He caught his oars and gave a violent stroke. The rowboat shot off sidewise from the ship's course.

"WHAT'S the matter?" Alarm was in Barbara's voice. She turned to look back at the ship.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Look at me!" Wayne said it sharply. He lurched forward and caught her face in his hands. His strange behavior terrified her. He half-apologized for his roughness, but at the same time held her tightly. "Don't look back at the rainbow. It's too—too ghastly bright."

"But *you're* looking!"

Wayne didn't answer. He held the girl's head close against his chest so that she couldn't see his face. He patted her arms with a gentleness that terrified rather than comforted. His grip was as strong as a machine. She might as well be blind and paralyzed.

But she could hear. Above the gentle lapping of waters against the rowboat there were still the voices of the excursion crowd — old voices — croaking laughter—drunken sobs—

The clamor was fading. One by one the voices were dropping out!

A shrill hilarious laugh turned into a hideous cackle and died away. A rollicking bit of cowboy song tapered off with a gruesome moan and went silent.

"Barbara! Barbara! Where are you?"

It was Judge Londotte's outraged cry, the last of the ship's voices.

"Barbara! My bowl of bread and milk. You never did get—"

Silence. Utter and complete silence.

The girl imprisoned in Wayne Early's arms struggled with all her might. "Let me go! I've got to get back to him. Please!" The girl choked with angry sobs. "Wayne Early, I hate you! Take your hands off me!"

Wayne relaxed his frozen grip on the girl's head and shoulders enough to allow her to catch her breath. Her eyes blazed up at him, then her lips parted aghast. The unspeakable terror in Wayne Early's face went through her like an electricution.

"What — what's happened?" she whispered. "Why is it so quiet?"

All she could hear was his heart pounding against her throat. Then his arms released her. She turned to look at the excursion ship.

It had drifted beyond the brilliant rainbow, several yards ahead of the rowboat, but she could see it quite vividly through the screen of mist. *The decks were empty. Everyone was gone.*

The ship moved slowly on, through the long minutes that followed, as if driven by subterranean currents. It described a wide semicircle, returned through the rainbow mists, floated idly back toward the Congo Gardens inlet.

Barbara and Wayne boarded it. They searched it from stem to stern. They found not a single person, living or dead. The mysterious rainbow had somehow swept the ship clean.

CHAPTER VI

IN THE lavender mists deep within the surfaces of the earth, nine of the Servants of Death were conferring.

"These three interlocked names are still awaiting a decision."

"We have brought one of them down."

"Which one?"

"The aged judge. He is now passing through the outer halls with other newcomers, on his way to join the silent parade of eternity."

"Our indecision calls for holding him back until the other two names have been acted upon."

"What is their situation by this time?"

"The talented young man is finding Londotte's absence an advantage. He is pressing for an immediate marriage."

"The girl, however, is dazed from the shock of her grandfather's disappearance."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"No doubt. We took Londotte through one of our few direct gateways. The opportunity was right for taking the girl, too, but we lacked a decision."

"Now she is confused. She is not so much grief-stricken as stung. Her outraged feelings have turned upon our new agent, Wayne Early, who is still ignorant of the nature of his work."

"We had best put Early to the test soon."

"Yes. He will be reluctant to continue unless he can catch a gleam of the service we are rendering. Has he been invited to come down for his first visit?"

"He is on his way. But it is his compassion for the bereaved girl that brings him. He hopes to clear himself of any wrongdoing."

"The old story. All of our agents, it seems, must go through that painful stage. It may be hard for him to reconcile himself to deaths he helped to bring about."

"Especially if we find it necessary to take the granddaughter and her friend."

"My feelings tell me that we should take both—before the marriage. Do the rest of you agree? . . . But wait. Our agent, Early, is approaching." . . .

WAYNE was falling through endless darkness. He couldn't believe it was happening, he snapped his fingers, yanked at his hair to convince himself he was conscious. It was more like the sinking sensation of taking ether—

Now the blackness was pierced by rays of deep purple light, so heavy a hue that he doubted at first whether it was more than a trick of his eyes. He kept falling. It was a magic carpet fall, not with currents of air cutting past him, rather as if he were inclosed in a protective ball which kept air, temperature, and gravity constant.

The purple light into which he fell grew brighter, more penetrating. He was descending into a vast underground cave whose depths couldn't be seen.

Up through the mists came millions of intricate lavender branches like arms of coral. Now he was falling past them and there was someone at his side—a shadowy figure that was neither man nor ghost.

The amazement which came over Wayne was due not so much to the figure's presence as to his own realization that this creature belonged here. With phantom-like gestures, it was trying to break the mental shock for Wayne—trying to let him down gently, as it were.

"Don't be afraid of me," said the phantom, as they descended side by side. "You have talked with me before."

"Up there?" said Wayne?"

"Yes, I met you at the door in Cairo, and forced you to fall. You suspected, then, that I was something other than a human being."

"Yes," said Wayne, startled to know that this shadowy form was so quick to read his mind. "Then you must know why I came, as well?"

"To learn the nature of your job. I'm not in the least surprised at your curiosity. Only a few of earth's men are privileged to be agents for this important work. Only a few are capable of appreciating it. You will know within a few hours whether you are worthy of continuing."

"What will I need to do," said Wayne, "to be worthy?"

"The first thing," said the phantom, "is to remind yourself that Death, however sad or painful or unwelcome, is an inescapable fact."

"Of course it is," Wayne answered hastily. "But what has that to do with your taking me into this strange underground world?"

"We are the Servants of Death," said the phantom.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THEY were still falling. A little later the phantom repeated his statement, but Wayne found himself unable to answer. The breath had all gone out of him, somehow, though the protective air around him had not changed.

Through the lavender mists Wayne saw the endless avenues of columns, spreading downward to the solid floor beneath. Then his feet were on that floor, he was walking with not one, but nine Servants of Death.

They talked with him as they explored the regions where nine hundred and ninety other Servants of Death were at work, making names vanish with swift strokes of their tireless fingers.

Wayne listened and watched. He stood motionless for many minutes when they pointed beyond the forest's edge to the marching columns of newly dead. There all ages and colors and types of human creatures mingled in a shadowy parade that vanished into the lavender mists beyond.

"Will I ever be able to mix with my fellow mortals after this?" Wayne asked himself, as the Servants were leading him back through the forest. They caught his question and answered it.

"You must. Only by doing so can you serve them and us."

Another Servant said, "What troubles you?"

Hesitantly Wayne explained his personal problem, the mystery of Judge Londotte's disappearance or death.

A Servant commented, "Judge Londotte was surely ready for death."

"But my guilt in leading him to it!" Wayne exclaimed impetuously. Then he saw that the Servants of Death were smiling at him. He was baffled. He blurted his purpose bluntly. "I want to recover him. "I've *promised*. I told his granddaughter that if it was *humanly* possible to bring him back—"

"It isn't *humanly* possible."

Wayne caught his breath. That Servant's emphasis upon the word "human" implied something at once hopeful and awful. "Then you—you *can?*"

"Not once in a million deaths do we employ that power. Only when our earth agents are new, like yourself, and require a special proof."

"You mean you'll restore Judge Londotte to life?" Wayne's voice trembled.

"Why must you be so eager? Would his return be a blessing? You must know that the girl is better off without him."

Wayne bit his lips in silence. He was beginning to understand. But there was a stubborn barrier in the way of reversing his intentions. "I've *promised* her—"

The nine Servants conferred among themselves for a few moments. Then:

"Judge Londotte," one of them announced, "will return to life for twenty-four hours. At the end of the time—to be precise, exactly forty-eight hours after he first entered death by the rainbow approach—he will come back to us."

"By the rainbow, as before," another Servant added.

They crossed through the columns and neared the misty parade of newly dead. After some waiting they whispered that the spirit of Judge Londotte was approaching. They commanded one of the marching shadows to come aside.

WAYNE EARLY, told to watch from a distance, saw the shadow take form. Against the background of a massive purplish-white column the cloudy mass became a dim silhouette of the aged grandfather, clothes in disarray, cane held stoutly in the puffy fist. Although the facial features did not

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

come clear, the voice betrayed a mood that was no less gloomy than in life.

Three of the Servants talked with him, asked if he knew he was in the realm of death.

The judge understood that this was death, that he had come because his life was done, that the rainbow had been a death-dealing device—a mercifully painless one.

"Are you content to stay?" a Servant asked. "Eternity is a long time. Would you like a few more hours on earth?"

The judge evaded the question. He stomped restlessly, bumped his cane against the column.

"Careful," a Servant warned. "You'll mar a name."

The judge gazed at the cane. "How was I able to bring this?"

"You were gripping it tightly when you came through the Rainbow of Death."

The judge's bulky form was motionless for a moment, then jerked as if shocked. His words clattered thickly.

"If I had held on to some other object—something I particularly wanted —"

"It would have come with you," said a Servant.

"Even if it was a person?"

"Even."

The phantom judge began to tremble. "By God, if I had it to do over—er—what's this you say? Can I go back to earth and die all over again?"

"Yes. A friend has interceded for you, so that you will have this rare privilege. We will conduct you back at once. Exactly forty-eight hours after your first rainbow exit from life you will make your second. Here are tickets."

They led the tottering old heap of shadows off, in the direction of Wayne's descent; and with one of the Servants as a traveling companion, Judge Londotte rose into the mists and disappeared.

The other eight Servants returned to gather around Wayne, who had suddenly gone icy to the fingertips.

"I must go back too," he said in a frenzied voice. "There's danger—"

"You must stay," said a Servant, and the others nodded in agreement. "You are here to witness the complications of our business. Until your favored friend, Judge Londotte, returns to us, you may witness the earth's happenings from this distance."

"Witness them!" Wayne gasped. The horror of helplessness was freezing him.

"Climb to the upper branches of this life-root," said a Servant. "All happenings will filter down to you. And if you wish, you may send whispered messages aloft to whomever you wish."

With a Servant's help, Wayne floated up through the mists to the uppermost branches that were like slender arms of coral. There he sat alone, waiting. At once he knew what was happening through the forests of death—in Cairo, high overhead—in Congo Gardens—

CHAPTER VII

THAT night, a full forty hours after Judge Londotte's mysterious disappearance, Barbara was packing the suitcases. For the fifth time she asked Larry to come and help her, for she was deathly tired, and the cases were heavy.

But Larry was busy putting the musical inspiration of the moment into manuscript.

"Is this all the help I can expect after we're married?" Barbara asked. To which Larry banged off a bar of a wedding march on the piano, came bounding over the suitcases, grabbed her and kissed her.

"That's the first time you've admit-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ted you're about to marry me," he exulted. "Hell, we're going to be so happy—"

"Please, Larry, I can't force myself to be happy yet, after all that's happened." She caught his accusing eye. He had been bitterly jealous of Wayne, and they had quarreled. Larry had argued strenuously that Wayne's airplane flight to Cairo was a walkout, to avoid accounting to the law for his sending a boatload of passengers to their death.

"I'm not talking about Wayne Early," Barbara added defensively. "I'm talking about Granddaddy. If you shared my affection for him—"

"But I do."

"I don't believe it. You haven't had a kind word to say about him since he was lost."

"He never had a kind word to say about my music," Larry snarled. "I can sing to most folks and lift them right into the clouds. But that damned crusty old fossil never had a soul."

"Larry! Please—"

"Be careful what you say, Larry." The whisper was barely audible.

"Huh? Who said that?" Larry was up on his toes. "It sounded like that Early bird."

Barbara hadn't heard anything. She looked at Larry suspiciously. He drew back the draperies, peered under the table, glanced into the hallway. Barbara warned him to pay no attention to strange sounds. This cheap ramshackle rooming house was full of them.

"You ought to apologize," she said, "for speaking that way of the dead."

"Your grandfather is not dead," said a whisper at her ear.

"Wayne!" the girl gasped. She rose, trembling, sure of the voice.

Larry's eyes narrowed at her viciously. "So he *is* here. He's eavesdropping—"

"Larry, did you hear what I heard? Granddaddy *isn't* dead. That whisper—just now—did you hear it? That's what it said."

"Let's get out of here, Barb," Larry snapped, his eyes combing every corner and shadow. "We're hearing things. That's what happens to folks when they get tired and jittery. Come on!"

They picked up their luggage and started. At the front door they met Judge Londotte. They backed into the hallway, for the aged gentleman was not only alive, he was angry . . .

IT WAS well after midnight before the consternation of that surprise entrance, as far as Barbara was concerned, modified into an acceptance of the new situation. The intervening two hours of excited talk were a strange mixture of doubts and fears, rejoicing, suspicions, distrust, confused emotions.

But there Judge Londotte sat, with his feet propped up on the suitcases and his flabby arm waving a fan at his pallid, perspiring face.

Larry wasn't one to admit he was utterly confused over the turn of events. He sat scowling, while the old gentleman talked, and did his best to be aloof and skeptical.

But when the judge related his vivid dream of descending into the region of the dead and talking with the phantoms that lived there, both Larry and Barbara were dumbfounded. That dream dovetailed too well with fact.

"But you were on the Rainbow Excursion ship, Granddaddy," said Barbara. "That part couldn't be a dream."

"Don't be silly," said the old man. "I still have the tickets. It's tonight that we go on the excursion." He produced three new tickets from his pocket.

Barbara and Larry exchanged glances. The judge's story was becoming impossible. Barbara distinctly remembered that all tickets had been col-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

lected on the Rainbow Excursion, and she knew that Larry, who had failed to make the boat, still had his.

"Where did you get those?" she asked accusingly. "Did Wayne sell you some more?"

"Certainly not," the old man growled. "I wouldn't go on the same excursion twice. We'll go tonight—the three of us."

"But you've *been!*"

"That was a *dream,* I tell you. It *had* to be a dream." Purple rage colored the old man's face. Barbara would have dropped the subject, just to humor him; but Larry had to throw a sarcastic remark into the fray.

"Did you get those fresh tickets in your dream?"

"What if I did?" the judge exploded. "I got them didn't I?"

Larry followed through cruelly. "Where's your cane? Did you leave that in your dream?"

"What if I did? I'm going back, ain't I—er—ah—ah—" The old man's roar broke off weakly, he groaned painfully, slumped back in his chair. He looked deathly scared.

BARBARA, though utterly terrified over his strange behavior, still had the presence of mind to cope with the situation. She whispered a warning to Larry. The old man must be humored. He'd had a nervous shock that might take months for him to overcome. Let him talk, don't cross his path, don't annoy him with argument. In time he would no doubt straighten his story out.

If there was anything Larry hated to do, it was to humor Judge Londotte. Damn it, just when the wedding march was humming in his ears—

"What's this, Granddaddy?" Barbara asked, as she was trying to help him out of his coat. A yellow slip of paper had fallen from his pocket. She and Larry examined it, to the tune of the old gentleman's dark mutterings. It was the stub of an airline ticket.

"All right, I've just flown back from Cairo," Judge Londotte snapped. "I *had* to fly back from Cairo. That's where my dream ended."

Barbara weaved, almost fainting from dizziness. This was too much. She wanted to scream, or run away—

But Larry, for once, came to her rescue in his backhanded method. "The old codger *is* crazy," he whispered, "but I'll help you humor him and maybe he'll pull out of it."

"Thanks, Larry."

"And we won't let him interfere with our getting married?"

"All right, Larry," the girl sighed . . .

NOW they were on the Rainbow Excursion boat, churning through the muggy blackness.

Barbara's spirit had rebelled against coming again; she had fought it with all her might. But there had been an overpowering urgency in Judge Londotte's demand. She and Larry must come with him—or were they harboring secret hatreds against him?

Of course the judge's whims had won out. To humor him, Barbara had turned a deaf ear to that eerie whisper, so like the whisper of Wayne Early, that seemed to be repeating in her ears, *"Stay off the boat . . . Stay off the boat . . ."*

Only now that whisper had changed to, *"Get off the boat . . . Get off the boat . . . Hear me, Barbara . . . Get off the boat . . ."*

It was maddening; and though it might be only the voice of conscience, Barbara knew her will had been weakened until she hadn't the strength to listen or to heed.

"You are riding toward death, Bar-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

bara . . . You are riding toward death . . ."

But her grandfather had ridden through the rainbow and he had suffered no injuries—at least, no physical ones.

"*Barbara, for God's sakes, does your grandfather possess your very soul? Assert yourself. Get Larry. Take the rowboat. Leave the old man to his own fate!*"

"Barbara!" Judge Londotte barked gruffly. "What are you jerking my hand for? Be still."

"But you're holding my wrist so tight, Granddaddy."

"I like to have you with me," said the old man. "I don't want you running away."

He led her along the rail to the stern, stood for several minutes studying the eastern skies beyond their wake. The dawn was blood red.

"Take a good look," the old man said.

The girl watched in silence. She was thinking of the dresses she had left packed in her suitcases in the rooming house. She should have put them on hangers; and would have, but her grandfather had been impatient, snapping, "Never mind about your clothes."

Now everyone was crowding to the fore of the ship, for the rainbows were coming into view. The first splash of sun fired the inner rainbow to scintillating brilliance. And, as it had happened forty-eight hours before, the ship moved by the magic of unseen currents straight toward the flaming spectrum.

"Where's Larry?" said Barbara. "Let me find him."

"Stay with me," said her grandfather, as they moved along the rail to take their places at the rear of the breathless, expectant crowd . . .

LARRY, as Barbara well knew, was inside, crashing some weird chords on the ballroom piano.

Several times during the preceding hours of darkness he had come bounding out to confide his new inspirations to Barbara. That "dream" of Judge Londotte's had gone to his head. There was a song in it—a smash!—nothing less.

Now, as the flaming rainbow came into view through the ballroom door, its blaze of color added fuel to his musical excitement. His eyes drank in the exotic colors, his hands flew over the keys—

"*Larry LeBrac . . . This is Wayne Early . . . Listen to me.*"

That damned disturbing whisper again! Just when he was hypnotized by his creative mood—

"*Larry . . . I am miles away, but I know what is happening. You are approaching the Rainbow of Death. Barbara and her grandfather are there, and he is clutching her hand. BREAK HIS GRIP!*"

Larry sprang up and paced the shadow-streaked ballroom floor. Barbara and her grandfather were out there at the rail; he could see them just as the whisper had described them.

But Larry could not see Wayne Early, and he went angry with suspicions. "Damn it, Early, you're pulling a joke. Where are you?"

"*Larry, I am communing with the Servants of Death. If you don't break the grip on Barbara's arm, she will go to death with her grandfather. Time is short! If you won't fight, SING!*"

"More tricks!" Larry hissed sarcastically, slipping into uncontrolled rage. "You be the cricket awhile, damn you, and let me play king of beasts."

"*One final warning, Larry. The Servants of Death have spoken in my hearing. If they take Barbara they will also take you.*"

"I'll take a chance," said Larry cyn-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ically, and back to the piano he went. There he stayed—until he heard Barbara's scream . . .

THE ship was inching along, now within a few feet of the wall of colored mists.

"Break away, Barbara! . . . Break away! . . . Break away! . . . It's Wayne, warning you—"

The whisper was mockery to Barbara's ears. She *couldn't* break away. The old man's grip tightened with unaccountable strength. And she couldn't believe in a whisper that came from nowhere. It was a hallucination, as unreal as her grandfather's dream, a figment of imagination—

The prow of the ship edged into the rainbow mists. Barbara's eyes were on the passengers at the head of the crowd when the screen of color began to envelop them. She saw—and screamed.

Then her free hand cupped over her mouth, held back her cry of utter horror. These aged decrepit sightseers were not seeing what she saw. They were fascinated by the rainbow—

One by one they were dissolving into thin air.

It began the instant the mists touched the first passenger, a stately old lady, standing statue-like, enthralled. Her clothes had at once been consumed, as if by a swift, flameless fire. The next moment her naked flesh was dissolving in the same manner—and by this time the second and third and fourth persons lined along the railing were entering the same process.

For a brief moment the stately old lady resembled a physiologist's glass model, transparent to the vital organs. But the swift, painless consuming process continued its magic work. Now there were only the fleshless bones of a graceful female skeleton, its clean lime-white hand still clinging to the rail.

The succeeding persons were transformed in like manner, one by one as the ship slid deeper into the mists. From living to dead—from nakedness, to fleshlessness, to disintegrating skeletons—all with a swiftness unknown to the Nature of mortal man. The first skeleton fell apart as it dissolved, but the invisible consuming was complete before the dust of any bone dropped to the floor of the ship.

The ship moved on. The rainbow of Death advanced across the promenades. Judge Londotte may have seen what was happening; he may not have. Barbara couldn't tell. He only stood fast and waited, gripping her wrist with the grip of death . . .

A NEW throb of genius had struck through Larry's sensitive fingers. What wild, weird, flamboyant chords he was crashing. This was old Londotte's strange rainbow dream and this eerie voyage all in one. But it was more—it was a new glory for Larry.

For once he wasn't depending upon an audience—not even Barbara.

"Go sing it to the crowd!" That disturbing whisper again!

"Hell, I don't need a crowd," Larry snorted, too absorbed to care whether the whisper was fake or fancy.

"Go sing it to them. Sing it to Londotte. If your song has the rainbow in it, it will move him."

"No music would ever move him!"

"Try it, you damned cynic. If you don't care about Barbara, at least save yourself. Climb the flag tower and sing it!

It was then that Barbara's stifled scream cut the air. Larry sprang up, sent the piano bench sprawling, raced out to the promenade. His voice broke out in song.

No one seemed to hear. Everyone was spellbound by the magic of the rain-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

bow.

But as Larry climbed the tower, singing as he went, he saw the source of Barbara's terror-stricken cry. The blood-chilling sight went straight to his throat, the melody turned into a new theme—a powerful theme laden with a fantasy of death—*and his voice gave!*

"Sing it! . . . Sing it! : . . More of that strange minor! . . . Now—up—up to a climax! . . . Now—hold it—hold it—"

That whisper might have been a master composer. Larry's voice obeyed, in rapport with the compelling words.

And the crowd gave ear. Even as men turned to skeletons and vanished, they inclined their heads toward the flag tower, listening. And of the living, no one listened more intently than Judge Londotte. His "dream" had inspired this song. The notes went through him.

"Now, stop!"

Larry stopped. A third of the crowd, still untouched by the mists, beat their hands in applause. Judge Londotte's hand slipped off Barbara's wrist to join in—

"Run Barbara! Climb the flag tower. Quick!"

Barbara ran. She caught the rungs of the steel ladder, began to climb.

The judge tottered after her, staggered, fell, drew himself up again. He moved toward her with arms outstretched.

As if in a nightmare, she fought vainly to gain the third step. But one of her hands might have been in a metal vise, it was so numb. Her hold slipped —she was going to fall—

Larry's arm swept down and caught her hand, drew her up the ladder two more steps—three—

"Barbara, come back to me!" Judge Londotte shrieked. "I demand it!"

His hand caught her ankle, his ponderous weight tugged—

EVEN as she glanced down, knowing she must fall, she saw the mists dissolve the sleeve from her grandfather's arm. Then the flabby flesh was eaten away, the muscles were gone, the grip on her ankle was undone. The arm fell to the massive naked side.

"Climb higher—higher—so the rays won't touch you!"

That was the last whisper Barbara remembered hearing. Larry must have heard it too, for he helped her up the flag tower with all the strength he could muster. Without his help she could have gone no farther, for the full realization of her grandfather's intent was in itself paralyzing.

When Larry and Barbara dared to look down, everyone was gone. Later, when the ship had found its way out of the mists back toward Congo Gardens, the couple descended, unharmed.

Barbara followed Larry into the ballroom. There was something she had to say.

"I've been mistaken about you, Larry. I've often thought you were so wrapped up in yourself and your music that down deep in your heart you never cared about anything else—even me. But now—well, you've saved my life. And you didn't have to do it. *You* were safe."

Larry shrugged uncomfortably. He kicked the piano bench into place, sat down, began to crash sombre chords.

"That *was* a good song," he said. "I wonder if it's got away from me . . . There were lots of whispers all the way through it." His touch went soft on the keys.

"I was hearing the whispers, too," said Barbara . . .

CHAPTER VIII

DEEP in the lavender mists that fill the caverns within the earth, the

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

nine hundred and ninety-nine Servants of Death are laboring.

At this hour, this minute, and this second, they are distributing their death strokes.

Death is their service to mankind.

Sometimes nine of them find time to talk of names that have already been erased.

"At last Judge Londotte has passed our forests of life and death, to join the parade of eternity."

"And the other two names were spared?"

"Yes, as we agreed, finally, that they should be. But it was no easy task, after our new agent was granted his special favor for Londotte."

"I think Early is ready to serve us, now, without asking any more special favors."

"And he will be a worthy agent. Through his ingenious whispers he threw a favorable light upon the talented young LeBrac, binding him and the granddaughter in a closer understanding."

"Shall we inform the judge that the couple are destined to a long and happy life, now that he is gone?"

"We had best withhold the news until it is complete. Our new agent has gone to the surface." . . .

Barbara Londotte was waiting at the Congo Gardens pier. Her luggage was already aboard the *Sunny Wave*. The captain had promised her that he would perform a marriage ceremony as soon as the boat left port. But where was Larry?

The boat whistled. It was time to get aboard.

Then a taxi whizzed up, and Larry and Wayne Early jumped out. Barbara became a statue on the gang plank. They hurried up to her.

"Mind if I ring in a substitute?" Larry jabbered. "I've got a helluva lot of music writing to do. You remember that publisher? Anyhow Wayne's your man, Barb. All three of us have known it ever since—"

"Thanks, Larry," Wayne broke in. "I'll carry on from there. The point is this, Miss Londotte. You're not safe on that ship—"

"All ashore that's going ashore!" the final warning rang out.

"You're not safe, crashing into people," Wayne said. "I'll go along to rig up that stoplight."

Barbara smiled. "I'm quite safe, thank you."

"Forget the stoplight," said Wayne. "I'm a mad, gay fellow. I want you to marry me."

A few minutes later the *Sunny Wave* pushed out of port and Barbara and Wayne waved farewell to Larry, who, as Barbara guessed, caught a wisp of music out of their departure.

Then Barbara, suddenly aware that real happiness was to be hers for the first time in her life, snuggled into Wayne's arms. And no one said anything about a stoplight.

WARFARE IN THE WATER

By ARNOLD BERMAN

FOR many years a favorite theme of science fiction authors has been the creation of whole worlds of monsters in the sub-microscopic realms of minute particles of matter. Many have been the thrilling stories conceived and written about this subject. But the recent development of camera and microscope technique has proven that the fantasy writers were

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

closer to truth than fantasy in their accounts of what went on at sub-microscopic levels.

In fact nothing they produced could equal the actual truth for strangeness and surprise. It has been known for some time that the drop of water was a battleground for greedy, ferocious creatures whose constant fight for food and survival would rival anything in the normal sized world. But the recent camera improvements have given us a picture of these creatures that pale into insignificance the accounts of science-fiction authors.

If a human being could be reduced in size and equipped with a diving helmet and lowered into a drop of water—here are some of the things he might see:

First, as his eyes grew accustomed to the murkiness, he would see oddly-shaped creatures resembling sea horses flashing before him. These would be the *parmecia,* comparatively peaceful fellows, content to live on the natural bacteria, rather than turn cannabalistic. Their search for the succulent bacteria is timeless and endless. They might be compared to cows grazing eternally on luscious grass.

They are not the only creatures, however, in this world of infinite smallness. Shell-like *protozoa* can be seen nimbly climbing a thread of *algae,* and queer animalcules flash past our observer's glass plate, whirling endlessly in their lightning-fast darts and dashes.

Off to one side our spectator might notice a cluster of barrel-shaped objects. Something stirs them and they begin to roll forward like marbles. Everything is calm and quiet—and then the storm breaks. The barrel-shaped objects slash forward into the huddled ranks of the *parmecia* with the ferocity of a tiger attacking a herd of sheep.

These barrel-like objects are *didinia,* the killers of the microscopic world. The viciousness and ruthlessness of their attack might cause our human onlooker a few qualms. They impale the struggling *parmecia* on their sword-like snouts and kill them with their venomous poison. Suddenly their snouts open wide to reveal a large mouth. Into this the *parmecia* disappears.

Our observer watches the cruelly unequal struggle continue. The *parmecia* are helpless before the ravenous onslaughts of the tiger-like *didina,* and not until their hunger is completely satisfied do they slow down their ferocious attack.

Now, glutted and torpid, they roll away. But before they have gone far, our human observer notices a gorgeous, blue-green creature clinging to a filament of floating vegetation. There is a sinister, watchful air about this creature that might cause our observer to focus his attention on him.

His interest will be repaid, for this colorful creature is the *trumpter,* the natural foe of the *didina.* As the *didina* roll beneath the filament of vegetation the *trumpter* drops to the ground back of the *didina.* The struggle is furious and swift, the *trumpter* eventually devouring the *didina* almost whole.

The variety of species in this sub-microscopic kingdom is endless. Our observer might watch for hours and never see two of the same species of creature flash before him. However, in one respect, all of these forms of life are united by their desire, which is to exist, and their impulse, which is to fight.

After an hour in these sub-level worlds our observer would be drawn up convinced that the only difference between the wars of man and the wars of the lower forms, is simply that the sub-microscopic denizens have something legitimate to fight about.

THE END

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

DON'T SWAT TOO FREELY

By
WARREN SHAW

Read this, then next time you swat a bug, look up his pedigree first!

THE next time you hear an insect buzzing around the vicinity, don't be too prone to reach out and let fly with palm or swatter. "That blamed bug," might very well be a somewhat innocent—and perhaps even useful—member of your community.

"What?" you protest, "a pesky bug who doesn't deserve swatting, and without whose companionship the world wouldn't be a lot better off?"

Yes, indeed. That's exactly what we mean. We're rising up on our hind legs to swat back—in a manner of speaking—for the much maligned beasties of the insect world. Too long has humanity considered all insects its mortal enemies. Too long have bugs been generally persecuted just because they are bugs. For believe it or not, out of some five hundred thousand species of bugs in existence, only a mere three hundred of them are actually our enemies! Check those figures again. For three hundred criminals in the insect world, we persecute four hundred thousand seven hundred innocent insects!

It ain't fair, you agree. Your darned right it isn't.

But people have so long accustomed themselves to thinking of bugs in terms of havoc wrought by termites, holes bored by moths, malaria carried by mosquitoes, typhoid and tuberculosis carried by houseflies, and beetles attacking stored foods, that none of us have paused to consider that insects do a great amount of good in this man's world.

People who bemoan the fact that insects destroy ten percent of our crops, seem totally unaware of the compensating fact that without insect pollination there would probably be no crops at all. And even beyond this one factor, insects go doggedly onward doing good for the world.

Insects annually produce millions of dollars for the world in such supplies as beeswax, fruits, dyes, honey, and silk. What would the female of the human species do if she didn't have the silken lovelies in clothing, stockings, etc., that she prizes so highly? And the lowly insect is the creature that is directly responsible for her silken luxuries.

And scientists can tell you that insects are to be thanked for their work in destroying dead and decaying plant and animal bodies which would clutter up the surface of our globe in no time at all if they were allowed to stay where they were.

For countless centuries, insects have served as the source for dyes. The Greek, the Roman, the Flemish brightly hued robes were colored from the poor dead body of Brother Insect. And all of us who've ever touched a can of shellac to that dining room chair are scarcely aware that the shellac is the result of insect existence.

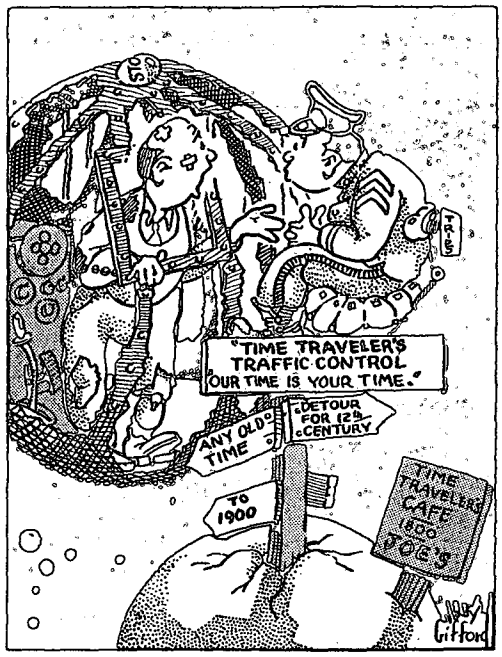
Even though it isn't quite so pleasant to contemplate, we owe many medicinal discoveries to insects. Maggots can heal human tissue through the very fact that they eat away the diseased parts of the flesh. Many human beings today owe their lives to the none-too-pretty maggots through just such medical treatment. And not so very long ago, through the use of ground dead maggots, physicians made an ex-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tract which, when injected into human beings suffering from sinus and/or mastoid infections, produced incredible progress toward curing the ailments.

Bees, in addition to their honey and beeswax activities, have been successfully commandeered in the medical field. Here a bee venom has been made into an extract that is now being used as one of the most recent treatments for rheumatism. And it is in the tiny body of the bee moth—a creature hated even by beekeepers—that medical science hopes very soon to find the virus which will immunize mankind from the scourge of tuberculosis.

So you see it isn't wise to make a general condemnation of the insect world. It has given us much, and will give us more. It has taught us plenty, and could quite possibly give us more knowledge than we'd ever hoped to have —sometime in the future!



"Better warn everyone not to stop in 1941 —there's a terrific commotion going on!"

DON'T MISS THE
Giant 244-Page
SPECIAL
JANUARY ISSUE
AMAZING STORIES
ON SALE AT ALL NEWSSTANDS—25c

The Giant 244-page Special January Issue of AMAZING STORIES is jam-packed with the world's finest science fiction . . . dynamic illustrations by top-notch artists . . . entertaining articles . . . clever cartoons . . . and many great EXTRA features. Thrill to the action-packed stories by such leading writers as Duncan Farnsworth, Robert Moore Williams, Don Wilcox, P. F. Costello, Festus Pragnell, Harry Bates, Frank Patton, and many other noted authors. Your newsdealer is now featuring this spectacular issue—Get your copy today or tomorrow sure.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

POPULAR Photography

FOR DECEMBER

Features:

☆ 34 PAGES OF SALON PRINTS IN BEAUTIFUL ROTOGRAVURE

☆ SPECIAL 8-PAGE SECTION OF MAGNIFICENT COLOR PHOTOS

☆ WINNERS IN THE BIG $6,000 1941 PRIZE PICTURE CONTEST

The 3rd Annual December Salon Issue of POPULAR PHOTOGRAPHY—bigger, better, and more beautiful than ever—features: (1) A 34-page salon section in gravure showing the finest of nearly 30,000 black-and-white pictures. (2) A special 8-page insert of magnificent natural color photos—the finest of nearly 10,000 transparencies. (3) 13 fact-filled, picture-packed articles by noted photographic experts which will help you to make better pictures with your camera. The demand for POPULAR PHOTOGRAPHY'S Special Annual Salon Issue will be great—for this number, with its fine collection of prize-winning pictures in color and black-and-white, challenges in value and surpasses in quality what many Annuals offer for $1.50 to $5.00. So don't get shut out—get your copy of the 3rd Annual Salon Issue of POPULAR PHOTOGRAPHY today—or tomorrow sure. Remember—it's priced at only 25c per copy.

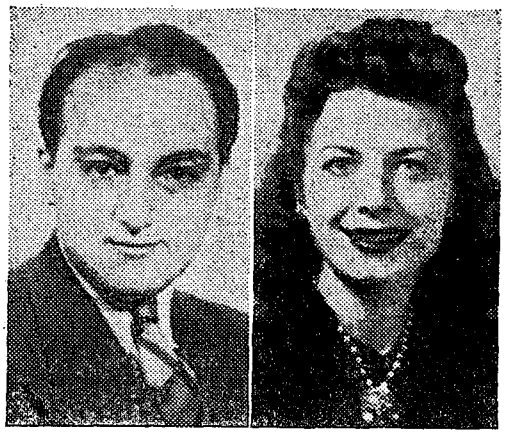
SPECIAL ANNUAL SALON ISSUE

NOW ON SALE AT ALL NEWSSTANDS AND CAMERA STORES! 25c A COPY

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

»»» *Introducing* «««

THE AUTHOR



Albert and Florence Magarian

THE team of Magarian was born one morning in May, 1937. I can't remember whether it was Monday or Tuesday but the sky was an aquamarine blue. You might write the Los Angeles marriage license bureau for any further information.

Being more than somewhat fascinated with each other, we played hookey from a life class that morning and took the noble plunge. We soon discovered that two could live just as reasonably as one . . . on nothing. The braver half of the team deserted our charming thatched wigwam for a position drawing rodents in a certain west coast animation studio. Being the lazier of the two, if that is at all possible, I occupied myself painting huge abstract canvases with long, involved titles. This gave me the delightful opportunity of decanting heatedly to a bewildered gallery about why, "Juxtaposition of Gertrude Stein Re-writing", "Remembrance of Things Past", "Queen Nefertiti Announcing 'The Terror Hour' ", was real art.

Winter and those semi-tropical showers set in. The rain poured alarmingly through our fragile roof. We perfected our back stroke and Australian crawl well enough to swim from the kitchen into what we fondly called the Studio. We deserted our slacks and shorts for a neat line of Balinese swim suits. What had once been a very satisfactory breakfast of shredded cereal now took on the shape and appearance of our thatched roof. Our carefully nurtured ebon tan . . . Manhattan Beach variety . . . paled. But, we still clung to our dream of Utopia.

We took to Tequila. Ruined our digestion with innumerable Tortillas. We cultivated such a horde of likewise disappointed idealists that we had to rise at five every morning to chase them out of our bathtub.

We acquired a patio full of a million or so sketches of Mickey, developed a sign language acquaintance with a hermit, and presently along came a cute little brown-eyed elf, named Alan, of whom we're extremely proud. Now that I look back on it all, nostalgia swipes me a terrific wallop in the solar plexus.

It must have been the morning that we discovered an army of silver fish had literally brought on indigestion by devouring our most prized Daumier print that we packed portfolio and easel and headed east.

We arrived in Chicago to be greeted by a perfectly stupendous blizzard. Stayed just long enough to meet your editor, Rap, and caught another train back. We finally thawed out. Vowed never to leave California again. We wound up in Manhattan the following year.

It was about the time that comic strips of the Superman variety were just beginning to catch popular fancy. The now ancient "Perils of Pauline" had nothing on the plots we hatched out in our third-floor-back brownstone domicile. In July the city resembled an angry inferno. Puzzling over the monstrous antics of the Myth and the Vision didn't make us feel like Esquimaux. Spending sleepless nights worrying the Claw out of a desperate spot didn't improve our dispositions. At the end of the month, *I* rebelled.

We caught a train to St. Louis, another to San Antonio. The nearest we ever came to getting back to California was the sandy coast off Galveston, Texas. My husband rudely yanked me back into the battle. A week later, we breakfasted near the foam-tinged waves of Lake Michigan.

We barnstormed Editor Rap with some pretty terrible illustrations. Finally "Three Eyes In The Dark," caught on. Regardless of the fact that the fans suspect Magarian of being a robot or someone else in disguise . . . maybe the Claw . . . we have been tremendously enthralled by your approval. We sincerely hope that it will be a long and pleasant association.

In case you are interested in our method of

(Concluded on page 143)

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

READER'S PAGE

COMPLIMENTS TO BURROUGHS

Sirs:

Compliments to your finest story by your best author, Mr. Edgar Rice Burroughs, who makes any fantastic tale seem perfectly plausible. In him you have the master of the art. Hats off to a sensational story by a man who knows his stuff! "Eight Who Came Back" was second, although excellent fiction. This issue was all good reading except the Al Addin story, which read like copy. Believe the cover on the November issue was the best animal cover that I have ever seen.

Billie Kelley,
Box 334,
Bloomington, Texas.

What kind of "copy" do you mean, Mr. Kelley? If you were a newspaper man, we might give it a different connotation than if you were a typist. —Ed.

LIKES HUMOR

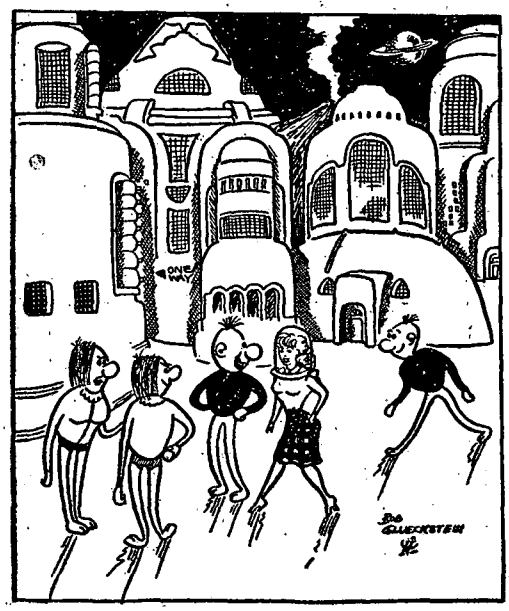
Sirs:

I like humor, I like fantasy fiction; combine these two for a very delightful type of story, like "Tink Takes A Hand," "Al Addin and the Infra-Red Lamp," "The Genius of Mr. Pry," and others. I notice that many of your humor stories are written by McGivern. Make the publication of humor stories a habit.

Stop me if I'm wrong, but I usually think of fantasy being science fiction, with the science left unexplained, and taking the background?

Lynn H. Benham,
Crothersville, Indiana.

William Peter McGivern is our best humor writer, although David Wright O'Brien isn't far behind. According to Funk & Wagnall, fantasy is a fantastic notion or mental image; fancy. To conceive in fantasy, form a mental image or re-image. Thus, you see, there is absolutely no science *in fantasy. All fans have this erroneous impression. When science does appear in this magazine, it is presented in a fanciful manner, and not at all intended to apply to the definition for science fiction.—Ed.*



"That Earthgirl! Whatever he sees in her is absolutely beyond me!"

UNCUT!!

Sirs:

I'm not writing this letter thinking that it will appear in print. The reason being that you cut out any unflattering remarks from the reader's contributions, and print them, looking like gawky love-letters. This letter is far from flattery. I hope, though that some inner spark of your former self lets you print this . . . I'd like the fans to see it! Damn, I'm disgusted with FANTASTIC and its giddy companion mag, *Amazing!* Reason? Because of the unfriendliness of the publications. You cut up letters, make them all look the same. Undernourished, monotonously praiseful. That isn't right. You know darn well that the fans like a large, unchanged reader's section. So what do you dish out . . . for a few more usually sloppy pages of story. Slop, dear Editor! Don't mind the insulting tone, but I mean every word of it.

It's either that you cut out praise, don't even look at insulting letters, or get all love and kisses from us fans. It isn't the last one; I'd stake anything on that.

There are seven readable s-f and fantasy mags, in my opinion. Your pubs used to be third and fifth. Now they're sixth and seventh! One reason is the explosion you read at the beginning of this letter. Another is the stinking artwork you've been dishing out. No Krupa, No Paul, Ruth's terrible work, Jackson's messy canvases . . . and possibly fair stuff from Hadley. What can the result be? I've found that out . . .

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ohhhh! And the stories, too, have lately been on a horrible downgrade. The last really good one being "The Return of Circe," so many months ago. Not that Don Wilcox's in the December ish was bad. But it wasn't good.

As you might be able to gather from the above missile, I am beginning to dislike *Amazing* and FANTASTIC. Here's hoping for improvement. I sincerely think it soon to be impossible at the rate you're going. I hope the January *Amazing* Special Offer is good . . . if not . . .

In closing I say . . . I dare you to print this letter . . . UNCUT!

Milt Lesser,
2302 Ave. O,
Brooklyn, N. Y.

We don't believe you mean half what you say. For instance, about not even looking at insulting letters. Wouldn't it be foolish to look at them? People who are insulting, ought to be ignored, or punched in the face. We are sure you don't go around insulting people. And cutting out those "insults" is just one job an editor has. He cuts out comment that is duplicated by other letters. He cuts out material that doesn't apply to the magazine, because it is of a personal nature. As for being unfriendly, you know we aren't. We have the friendliest policy in the magazine publishing field. No other office is thrown open to our readers as is ours. No other editor has a "coffee club" and takes valuable time off, even in deadline days, to entertain a reader. We do it dozens of times each day—and we hate coffee!

We ordinarily also ignore challenging letters, but we reproduce yours in a friendly spirit, because we are *desirous of being friends and we will go out of our way to make friends.*

And strangely, we get so many complimentary letters, that the reader's column does look like "gawky love" at times!

Why not write us another letter, and tell us your reasons *for not liking our artists, and our stories. What's wrong with them? We sincerely want to know.—Ed.*

WHEE!!!

Sirs:

Both your magazines (FA and AS) are absolutely perfect, superb, super-collosal, etcetera. Your stories are perfect to the Nth degree. Your departments excell all other magazines, and best of all, you have very little advertising. Keep up this and perfection (with a capital) will be yours. Your best authors are: Burroughs, McGivern, Binder, Coblentz, Wilcox and Williams. Your illustrators follow the same standard, with Paul (cover) and Magarian (interior) in the lead. How can I get Sept. '41, FA?

Donald Jalbert,
Winchendon, Mass.

Our circulation department has back issues on sale. The cost is 25c for this issue.—Ed.

CUT!!

Sirs:

I have been reading FANTASTIC and *Amazing* for quite a while. They *are the two best* in the stf world.

I enjoy the footnotes throughout the stories. It adds greatly to them. An editorial help that puts the finishing touch to them. Also shows that you have your heart in your desire to make two GREAT magazines even better.

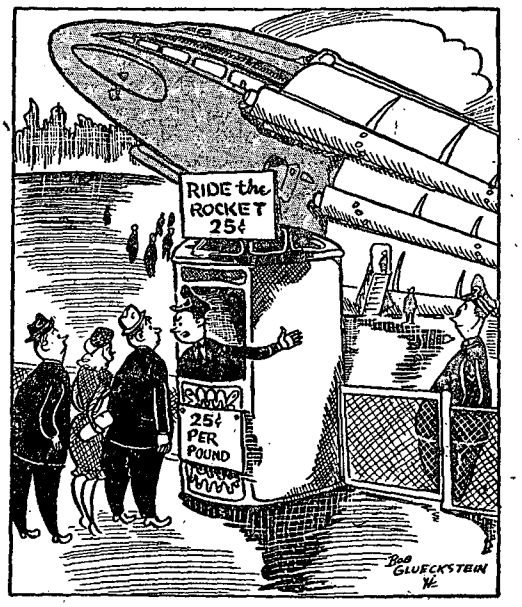
The Editor's Notebook—fine, but too short. An excellent editorial style. Friendly and cheerful, giving you the feeling that it was written especially for you and no other.

How soon will you be printing the mags twice a month, and with an extra enlargement of from ten to twenty pages? Five, maybe ten cents higher? Hell, we'll all pay it!

Paul H. Slack,
P. O. Box 353,
New Hope, Penna.

Yes, we cut this letter. It was four times as long as this. We must be fair to other readers too, and give them a chance to say something. But what Mr. Slack has said applies to this particular issue and especially to Mr. Lesser's letter. So, both sides have had their say now. The rest of you will certainly get in on the show. Your letter may just be one of thousands duplicating each other next month, and therefore not be printed, but it'll have its effect on us none-the-less, and be deeply appreciated.

We suggest that you refer to our January issue of AMAZING STORIES, *which has 96 added pages this month. The cost is 25c and it's worth it. Don't say we didn't tell you about it!—Ed.*



"Nobody knows where it'll end up — take it or leave it!"

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Law!
LEARN AT HOME
Are you adult, alert, ambitious, willing to study? Investigate LAW! We guide you step by step—furnish all texts, including 14-volume Law Library. Training prepared by leading law professors and given by members of bar. Degree of LL. B. conferred. Low cost, easy terms. Send NOW for Free, 48-page "Law Training for Leadership."
LaSalle Extension University, Dept. 1275-L, Chicago
A CORRESPONDENCE INSTITUTION

SAVE UP TO 50% FACTORY-TO-YOU
9 BANDS (ON 6 DIAL SCALES)
20 TIMES BETTER FOREIGN TUNING with SUPER BAND SPREAD RADIO!
30 DAYS TRIAL
PUT THIS CHASSIS IN YOUR PRESENT CABINET
E-Z TERMS
UP TO $50.00 TRADE-IN
WRITE for big FREE catalog. New 1942 models include Radios, Radio-Phonos, Home Recorders. Sensationally low factory-to-you prices: $12.95 to $212.50. 816 TUBES (User-Agents Wanted).
$19.95 COMPLETE
with SPEAKER, TUBES, PUSH-BUTTON TUNING, MAGNA TENNA LOOP AERIAL... READY TO PLAY
MIDWEST RADIO CORPORATION
DEPT. 128-F CINCINNATI, OHIO

FALSE TEETH
MONEY RETURNED IF NOT SATISFIED!
$6.50
Order by mail—a wide selection of styles. As LOW AS $6.50 a plate. Your money back if not satisfied.
INDIVIDUALLY Made from YOUR Mouth Impression
Send No Money
90 Days' Trial
90 Days' Wearing Trial
Ask for free descriptive circular showing different styles and FREE impression material. Ask about our budget savings plan. Gold crown given with plates No. 2 to No. 6. Write today.
WARD DENTAL LAB., 936 W. 63rd St., Dept. 50-M, Chicago

SONG POEM WRITERS:
Send us your original poem, Mother, Home, Love, Sacred, Patriotic, Comic or any subject, for our plan and FREE Rhyming Dictionary at once.
RICHARD BROTHERS
27 Woods Building Chicago, Ill.

High School Course at Home
Many Finish in 2 Years
Go as rapidly as your time and abilities permit. Course equivalent to resident school work—prepares for college entrance exams. Standard H. S. texts supplied. Diploma. Credit for H. S. subjects already completed. Single subjects if desired. High school education is very important for advancement in business and industry and socially. Don't be handicapped all your life. Be a High School graduate. Start your training now. Free Bulletin on request. No obligation.
American School, Dept. H-939, Drexel at 58th, Chicago

ARTISTS RATED

Sirs:

I rate your artists (from recent showings) as follows:

1. Krupa—both covers and interiors.
2. Paul—best on covers.
3. McCauley—Ah, the Mac Girl!
4. Fuqua—give him more covers.
5. St. John—best on covers.
6. Magarian—improving.
7. Jackson—rotten.

In the August issue, Magarian's pics improved 100%, but Rod Ruth didn't click with me.

Alfred Wm. Lorentz,
151 East 60th Street,
New York, N. Y.

What about this, readers? Any more opinions on our artists? They've been neglected in this "rating" business.—Ed.

DON'T CUT READER'S COLUMN

Sirs:

The first thing I do when I pick up your magazine is thumb wildly through the pages 'til I find the Reader's department. Then I set back with a sigh and prepare to read dozens of letters. Sure, but what happens in the September issue? I go through the same procedure and what happens then? A mere seven letters. I was horror-stricken. Seven letters! Gads!

I don't care what anyone will call me, but I think "Miracle At Dunkirk" was the best. Let's have more like that.

Morton S. Handler,
3537 W. Ainslie Street,
Chicago, Illinois.

Yes, we know! Okay, okay, we'll go back to the old big-size letters department. Next month. Unless our scheduled stories run too long. But positively by the month after.—Ed.

KEEP WRITING, SCHACHNER!

Sirs:

I thought I ought to write and let you know how good I think FANTASTIC ADVENTURES is. It's tops!

"The Return of Circe"—The best by Nat Schachner yet. Tell him to keep writing.

"The Secret League of Six"—Not bad. Wilcox has done better.

The article by Powell was good. Why don't we men do something about it?

George H. Weston,
Skowhegan, Me.,
Box 25.

Powell has written a follow-up article, in which something is done! It'll appear soon.—Ed.

TAKE THOSE COVERS . . .

Sirs:

Take those covers . . . and eat 'em! Artistically swell, wonderful, magnificent, beautiful, etc.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Fantastically: man, some chassis, oh babe, classy, a beaut, oozy, some sex appeal, etc.

Sure, the Mac Girl is great. Her beauty makes Hollywood look like the sticks. As art! If that's what it's to be, why not change the title to "Artistic Adventures," and be done with it?

Personally I have nothing whatever against the girls, but that is mainly because the ones I know don't slither around in the sort of thing the cover of FA boasts. I would like to see the Mac Girl, just once, on the cover clad in a formal, quiet suit, such as your secretary might be wearing, or even a slack-suit, and a tennis racket under one arm.

Sure, I know. Spring fever! Well, a scant one now and then, maybe but no habit.

Chrysanthemum C. Jones,
From Pluto.

How about the Mac Girl on this issue? Is she sufficiently clad? If you still object, we have one coming up in Amazing *which ought to satisfy. She's fully clothed. And we'll have the Mac Girl, before Time ends in almost everything, we feel. So take heart, Mr. Flowery Jones, and keep the cap on the Pluto bottle!*

Which just about ends the Reader's column for this month. We hope we've succeeded in making it interesting, even if short. We'll keep it so from now on. Keep writing!—Ed.

INTRODUCING THE AUTHOR

(Concluded from page 139)

working, consult the manager of the building where we reside. The rest of the tenants have moved out. Seriously, we take care of whatever part of the illustration we feel we do best. Each picture contains a decillion dots or more. If, Seurat, master of stipple, died in an asylum at an early age, so can we.

And so, I guess this practically winds up our first autobiography. Only, I found the subject so fascinating that I'm wondering what I'm going to do with the tons of torrid manuscript littering the floors. It contains the awful, unvarnished, unexpurgated, truth about us!

CLASSIFIED ADVERTISING

Songs—Poems

SONGWRITERS: Send poem for our plan and FREE Rhyming Dictionary. RICHARD BROTHERS, 168 Woods Building, Chicago.

Miscellaneous

PHOTOS, Novelties, Books. Big Assortment $1.00. Catalog 10c. Gross Specialties, C, Carnegie, Pa.

PATENTS, TRADE MARKS COPYRIGHTS
Protect Your Valuable Assets.
Expert Service.
LESTER L. SARGENT
Registered Patent Attorney, 1115 K St. Washington, D. C.

NEW TRIPLE BENEFIT LOW COST LIFE POLICY INSURES WHOLE FAMILY

COSTS YOU ONLY $1 PER MONTH FOR ALL

This Wonderful Life Insurance Policy protects your entire family—from the smallest child to grandparents—ages 1 to 80. No Medical Examination.

PAYS UP TO $3,000.00 MAXIMUM

Every member of the P. H. Wall family of North Dakota, above, is covered by their one big policy. This amazing policy pays for natural or ordinary death, auto accidental death or travel accidental death at less than 3½c a day for the entire family. Send the coupon today.

SEND NO MONEY—FREE POLICY INSPECTION OFFER

I want you to have this Family Group Policy for 10 days without obligation. No agent will call—you return it if not satisfied. The Pioneer Life Insurance Company is old and reliable having paid thousands and thousands in cash benefits to policy holders.

EXAMINE POLICY ON FREE OFFER

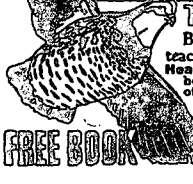
PIONEER LIFE INSURANCE CO. NO AGENT
Elgin Tower, Dept. P-63-E, Elgin, Ill. WILL CALL

Please rush without obligation the 10-DAY FREE INSPECTION OFFER and full details of the New "Century" Triple-Benefit Family Life Insurance Policy. Send No Money.

Name.....

Address.....

Learn to MOUNT BIRDS



Tan SKINS, make up FURS

Be a Taxidermist. *Double your hunting fun.* We teach you at Home. Mount Birds, Animals, Fish, Heads, common specimens. Fun and profits. Decorate home and den MAKE MONEY. Mount game, tan for others. Big profits in spare time. WRITE TODAY. 100 game pictures in FREE BOOK. Hunters, get your copy. It's Free. Send post card. State your AGE.

NORTHWESTERN SCHOOL OF TAXIDERMY
Dept. 3039 Omaha, Nebraska

FREE BOOK OFFER

WANT A U. S. GOVERNMENT JOB?

START $1260 to $2100 Year

Men—Women Prepare Immediately for 1942 Examinations.

32 Page Civil Service Book —FREE.

Mail Coupon Today, Sure.

—COUPON—

FRANKLIN INSTITUTE,
Dept. D-240, Rochester, N. Y.
Sirs: Rush to me without charge (1) 32-page book with list of many U. S. Government Big Pay Jobs. (2) Tell me how to qualify for one of these jobs.
Name .....
Address .....

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Help Kidneys If Back Aches

Do you feel older than you are or suffer from Getting Up Nights, Backache, Nervousness, Leg Pains, Dizziness, Swollen Ankles, Rheumatic Pains, Burning scanty or frequent passages? If so, remember that your Kidneys are vital to your health and that these symptoms may be due to non-organic and non-systemic Kidney and Bladder troubles—in such cases CYSTEX (a physician's prescription) usually gives prompt and joyous relief by helping the Kidneys flush out poisonous excess acids and wastes. You have everything to gain and nothing to lose in trying Cystex. An iron-clad guarantee wrapped around each package assures a refund of your money on return of empty package unless fully satisfied. Don't take chances on any Kidney medicine that is not guaranteed. Don't delay. Get Cystex (Sis-tex) from your druggist today. Only 35c. The guarantee protects you.

Cystex
Helps Flush Kidneys

FALSE TEETH

LOW AS $6.85

90 DAYS' TRIAL
TEST THEM
EXAMINE THEM

We make FALSE TEETH for you by mail from your own impressions. You have satisfaction of MONEY BACK GUARANTEE. Customers in United States and Canada report SATISFACTION but you be your own JUDGE.

SEND NO MONEY WRITE TODAY for FREE BOOKLET and MATERIAL.

CLEVELAND DENTAL SUPPLY CO.
Dept. 50-T1, East St. Louis, Illinois

MEN WANTED!

EARN MONEY EASY WITH GREAT NEW TAILORING LINE.
SENSATIONAL PAYMENT PLAN

Unbeatable values! Order-getting features galore—make it easy to earn big money and get your own suits FREE as extra bonus, showing friends sensational new line made-to-measure suits and taking orders on partial payment plan. No experience. No money needed to cash in big! Write at once for complete actual sample line of rich new woolens, newest styles and sure-fire-order-getting plans. *Sent Free!*

GIBSON, 500 South Throop Street, Dept. Z-504, Chicago, Illinois

BEAT THOSE CHEATERS

New copyrighted book BEAT THE CHEAT just off the press. Exposing four major card secrets. Invisible Ink. White Card Ink. X-Ray Expose. Seethru. Know first three cards down. Make any point with Fair Dice. Missers and Passers. Slot Machine and Punch Board Expose. Don't let crooks outsmart you. Get wise! Quit losing! Protect yourself. BEAT THE CHEAT for $1.00. (Add 25c for late catalog.)

SPECIALTY EXPOSE Box 2482-A Kansas City, Mo.

IN EVERY EMERGENCY

there is an element of danger. Does this danger call forth in you the necessity for moral defense? Defense is an attitude of mind. Cultivate the mind, and you will be invulnerable. In an "unlimited emergency," you must keep pace with an unlimited vision of a glorious future and an unlimited experience of vocational expression. *Read LEMURIA THE INCOMPARABLE, 60 page book* on a New Order and Race. TWO DIMES covers the cost. Don't wait; send your request today to Dept. 52.

LEMURIAN FELLOWSHIP 928 N. PLANKINTON AVE. MILWAUKEE, WISCONSIN

BARGAINS!!!
Used Home-Study Courses
BOUGHT-SOLD-RENTED

72-PAGE ILLUSTRATED CATALOG FREE

Write today for big FREE illustrated catalog explaining this amazing service. Used correspondence courses and educational books on every subject. 100% satisfaction guaranteed. We buy for cash—we offer unbelievable bargains. Send your name on penny postcard at once! No obligation.

NELSON CO., 4500 Sherman, Dept. M-226, Chicago

FOR DEFENSE

BUY UNITED STATES SAVINGS BONDS AND STAMPS

ON SALE AT YOUR POST OFFICE OR BANK

AMERICA ON GUARD!

Above is a reproduction of the Treasury Department's Defense Savings Poster, showing an exact duplication of the original "Minute Man" statue by famed sculptor Daniel Chester French. Defense Bonds and Stamps, on sale at your bank or post office, are a vital part of America's defense preparations.

READ AMAZING STORIES

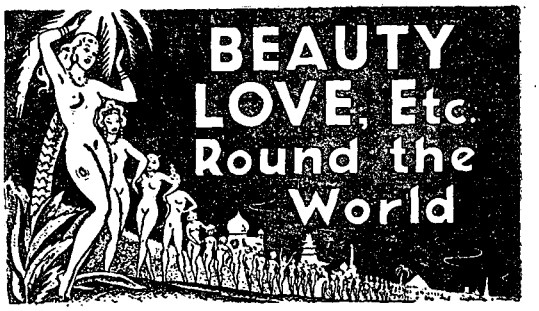
ON SALE THE 10th OF EVERY MONTH

CORRESPONDENCE CORNER

S. Cadgene, 396 Walnut Street, Englewood, N. J., has a large number of magazines—Cosmopolitan, Redbook, etc., which he wishes to sell—open to offers . . . Russ Bradbury, Company A, 1st Medical Battalion, Fort Devens, Mass., would like to obtain a copy of AMAZING STORIES in which the story, "The Bridge of Light" appeared . . . Lawrence Collins, 1963 Maud Ave., Chicago, Ill., 17 years old would like boys and girls any age to correspond with him. He is interested in science, stamps, aviation, auto mechanics, reading sports, etc. . . . Harold Kleemeyer, 7103-69 Street, Glendale, N. Y., desires to correspond with anyone possessing February, March, April, 1927 issues of AMAZING STORIES, also AS annual for July, 1927 and quarterly for February, 1928 . . . Blain R. Dunmire, 108 Maple Street, Charleroi, Pa., would like to hear from collectors from whom he can obtain first issues of SF mags. He would be interested in hearing from amateur writers of weird and interplanetary yarns, who might possibly be interested in contributing something to his weird fan magazines . . . Fred Schendel, Caixa Postal, 424, Porto Alegre, Brazil, 19 years old,

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

would like to receive letters from boys or girls of any age from all parts of the world. His hobby is snap-shooting . . . Corp. Robert M. Shinn, Company B, 160th Inf. (Rifle), Camp San Luis Obispo, California, wishes to get in touch with some of the Esperanto fans in Hollywood or Los Angeles . . . R. Gonzalez Puente Av. Prima vera N. 159, Tacubaya, D. F., Mexico, has for sale a complete collection of AMAZING STORIES, starting with Vol. 1, No. 1 (April, 1926) to Vol. XII, No. 7 (December, 1938) including all copies published, Quarterlies, Annuals, etc. . . . Jack Townsend, Box 604, Wilson, N. C., desires to correspond with fans interested in radio. . . . Neil Sheffield, 7107 Ave. E., Houston, Texas, 19 years old, is interested in our Latin-American neighbors. He can speak Spanish and would like to hear from persons who would correspond with him, partly if not completely, in that language . . . Robert Burnett, 326 S. Second St., Rockford, Ill., would like pen pals, male or female interested in writing and electricity,—prompt replies . . . Robert Wise, 642 Evergreen Ave., Youngstown, Ohio, would like to correspond especially with inhabitants of Mexico or New Orleans. He is 18 and interested in radio, stamps, physics, traveling. Also speaks French and Spanish . . . Pvt. 1cl. Joseph A. Saracena, 100 First Military Police Battalion, Fort Dix, N. J., would be glad to answer anyone in the western hemisphere . . . Dave McIlwain, 14 Cotswold St., Liverpool, 7, England, wishes to get in touch with Esperantists and esp-ists-to-be in America, north and south . . . Brice Paulsell, 5929 Catina Street, New Orleans, La., wants readers of SF who are interested in forming a club to write to him . . . James Daley, 6 Bearse Ave., Dorchester, Mass., would like to exchange the Burroughs novel, "The Moon Maid" for the "Land That Time Forgot" or "King Kong" . . . Tom Ludowitz, 2232 Rainier, Everett, Washington, has the following new books for sale at $1.00 each:—Carson of Venus; Lost on Venus; Pirates of Venus; Tanar of Pellucidar; At the Earth's Core; Pellucidar! A Princess of Mars; The Gods of Mars; The Warlords of Mars; Thurvia, Maid of Mars; The Chessmen of Mars; The Master Mind of Mars . . . James T. Kerr, 11 Nassau Road, Upper Montclair, N. J., would like to obtain copies of the first three issues of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES, and also a copy of The New Adam . . . Lee W. Davis, 3024 16th Street, Detroit, Mich., would very much like correspondence from both sexes who are interested in political economics and social science . . . George Naone, Medical Detachment, 298th Infantry, Schofield Barracks, T. H., wants pen pals on the mainland. He is 20 years of age and of Hawaiian ancestry, is five feet seven inches tall and weighs 150 pounds. His hobby consists of collecting pictures of all different countries, swimming, bowling, and playing baseball . . . Louise E. Hilliard, 16 Kimball Road, Arlington, Mass., would like to hear from anyone interested in history, art, travel, the Army, or fantastic fiction especially in the Regular Army or the Marine Corps . . . Dan King, No. 3



World's Greatest Collection of Strange & Secret Photographs

NOW you can travel round the world with the most daring adventurers. You can see with your own eyes, the weirdest peoples on earth. You witness the strangest customs of the red, white, brown, black and yellow races. You attend their startling rites, their mysterious practices. They are all assembled for you in these five great volumes of The SECRET MUSEUM OF MANKIND.

600 LARGE PAGES

Here is the World's Greatest Collection of Strange and Secret Photographs. Here are exotic Photos from Europe, Harem Photos from Africa, Torture Photos, Female Photos, Marriage Photos from Asia, Oceania, and America, and hundreds of others. There are almost 600 LARGE PAGES OF CAMERA SHOTS, each page 62 square inches.

1,000 REVEALING PHOTOS

You see actual courtship practiced in every quarter of the world. You see magic and mystery in queer lands where the foot of a white man has rarely trod. You see Oriental modes of marriage and female slavery in China, Japan, India, etc. Through the close up of the camera you witness the exotic habits of every continent and female customs in America, Europe, etc. You are bewildered by ONE THOUSAND LARGE PHOTOGRAPHS, including 130 full-page photos, and thrilled by the hundreds of short stories that describe them.

Contents of 5-Volume Set

VOLUME 1
The Secret Album of Africa

VOLUME 2
The Secret Album of Europe

VOLUME 3
The Secret Album of Asia

VOLUME 4
The Secret Album of America

VOLUME 5
The Secret Album of Oceania

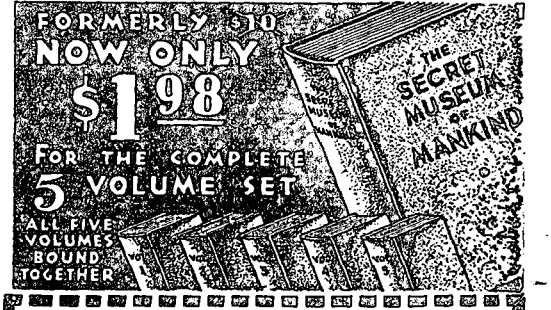
5 PICTURE-PACKED VOLUMES

Specimen Photos
Dress and Undress Round the World
Various Secret Societies
Civilized Love vs. Savage
Strange Crimes, Criminals
Slavery
Omens, Totems & Taboos
Mysterious Customs
Female Slave Hunters
1,000 Strange & Secret Photos

The SECRET MUSEUM OF MANKIND consists of five picture-packed volumes (solidly bound together for convenient reading). Dip into any one of these volumes, and as you turn its daring pages, you find it difficult to tear yourself away. Here, in story & uncensored photo, is the WORLD'S GREATEST COLLECTION OF STRANGE AND SECRET PHOTOGRAPHS, containing everything from Female Beauty Round the World to the most Mysterious Cults and Customs. These hundreds and hundreds of large pages will give you days and nights of thrilling instruction.

SEND NO MONEY

Simply sign & mail the coupon. Remember, each of the 5 Volumes is 9½ inches high, and opened, over a foot wide! Remember also that this 5-Volume Set formerly sold for $10. And it is bound in expensive "life-time" cloth. Don't put this off. Fill out the coupon, drop it in the next mail, and receive this huge work at once.



METRO PUBLICATIONS
70 Fifth Ave., Dept. 1912, New York

Send me "The Secret Museum of Mankind" (5 great volumes bound together). I will pay postman $1.98, plus postage on arrival. If not delighted, I will return book in 5 days for full refund of $1.98. (No foreign orders accepted at this low price!)

Name .....

Address .....

City ..... State .....

☐ CHECK HERE if you are enclosing $1.98, thus saving mailing costs. Same Money-Back Guarantee.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

SHOPMEN . . . FOREMEN

Train

For the Job Ahead

Take advantage of the great need for supervisors, foremen, general foremen, superintendents. This need will increase because of the Defense Program and the business boom. Add to your present ability the knowledge which will prepare you for these better jobs. You can do it quickly, in your spare time at home, at moderate cost. LaSalle *Modern Foremanship* training is condensed, interesting, practical—what you study tonight, you can use on the job tomorrow. It was built by experienced factory men and is taught by experienced shopmen. Write for our free 48 page booklet, "Modern Foremanship." It tells of the opportunities and gives full details of our training. It's FREE. Mail this ad or write today.

LASALLE EXTENSION UNIVERSITY
A Correspondence Institution
Dept. 1275-MF, CHICAGO

Choice of the LATEST STYLES—remarkably LOW PRICES. SATISFACTION GUARANTEED or your money back. If you are not satisfied—they will not cost you a cent.

SEND NO MONEY Write for FREE catalog today showing all of our many styles and LOW prices!

ADVANCE SPECTACLE CO. 537 S. Dearborn St., Dept. HH-12 Chicago, Ill.

BROKEN GLASSES REPAIRED AT LOW COST!

CASH PAID

for old books and pamphlets. Thousands of no longer wanted books can be sold for premium prices. Send three cent stamp for folder describing kinds of old books and other literary property we buy.

PENN BOOK CO., Box 2172, Philadelphia, Penna.

DO YOU WANT TO STOP TOBACCO?

Banish the craving for tobacco as thousands have. Make yourself free and happy with Tobacco Redeemer. Not a substitute, not habit forming. Write for free booklet telling of injurious effect of tobacco and of a treatment which has relieved many men.

FREE BOOK

THE NEWELL COMPANY
600 Clayton Sta., St. Louis, Mo.

LEARN THE BLACK ARTS

Mystic mind magic, palmistry, astrology, dream interpretations, fortune telling and other oriental esoteric practices. Fully explained in our unusual illustrated book catalog, listing books from 25c up. Highly instructive and entertaining. Catalog for 3c stamp.

3c

ASTURO PUBLICATIONS, Dept. R
24 East 21st Street New York

SEND NO MONEY!—Save Money!

TRANSPARENT ROOFLESS PARTIAL

60 Days' Trial! We make FALSE TEETH for you by MAIL from your own mouth-impression. Money-Back Guarantee of Satisfaction. FREE Free impression material, directions, catalog.

$7.95 to $35

Professional Model

U. S. Dental Co., Dept. C-13, Chicago

Cragmor, Colorado Springs, Colo., would like to obtain back issues of AMAZING, before Sept. 1934. . . . Dick Shunk, 16, Route No. 2, Box 263, Sewell, N. J., wants pen pals interested in SF, chemistry, or automobiles . . . Calling Amateur astronomers! Join the "I A S" (International Astronomical Society). Get in touch with Abraham Oshinsky, 2855 W. 25 Street, Brooklyn, N. Y. . . . Earnest Oney, 617 Herrick Ave., Wellington, Ohio, has a large number of SF mags that some of you readers might like to buy. Also, he would like to hear from anyone interested in languages and archeology . . . Joris F. Martin, 2715 W. Yale Avenue, Denver, Colo., wishes to correspond with either sex, around 14 years of age, interested in SF and any kind of science . . . Oliver Brown, 1431 Jefferson Street, Duluth, Minn., would like to obtain the following: The Skylark series; Invaders from the Infinite; or The Stone from the Green Star . . . S. M. Ritter, 1160 Simpson Street, New York City has over 50 S-F mags to trade for '41 copies. Would also like to hear from those who enjoy reading non-fiction, particularly history and biography . . . Harry Harrison 141-45 78 Road, Kew Gardens, New York, is desirous of corresponding with anybody in the New York City area interested in aiding him publish a STFan magazine . . . Don Eastman, 239 Sherman Ave., Council Bluffs, Iowa, would like to buy books by E. R. Burroughs. Also, he would like to correspond with girls about 14 or 15 years old . . . Guiger Zwich, Just-a-Mere-Farm, Orchard Park, N. Y., Box 284, has all 1940-41 AMAZING magazines for sale at regular prices—also quarterlies. If Wm. R. Monty Entwistle will send his address at once, he can have the books he asked about . . . Patricia Loriot, 21, 244-56 90 Ave., Bellerose, New York, and Jean Larsen, 20, 95-11 111 Street, Richmond Hill, N. Y., are lonely and want some pen pals around their own age . . . Walter A. Barrett, R. F. D. No. 1, Milford, Michigan, 31 and a bachelor, would like to correspond with members of either six who are interested in the study of Psychology. He can promise some very interesting letters containing many new and advanced ideas to anyone who cares to write . . . Bill Hall, 6923 Agnes Ave., North Hollywood, Calif., age 17, interested in aviation, sports, music, reading, etc., would like to have correspondents. All letters will be answered . . . Gustav Youngkvist, 973 47th Street, Brooklyn, N. Y., wishes to correspond with fellows and girls 15 and up, interested in SF, will answer all letters and trade photos . . . Donald Branning, 8509 N. Newport Ave., Tampa, Fla., would like to correspond with anyone, anywhere, age 16 to 60. He is interested in Literature and Science . . . Jo Claire McConckey, 65-10 79th Place, Middle Village, L. I., N. Y., desires pen pals. Can promise interesting letters . . . Robert Richel 12-13 Ellis Avenue, Fairlawn, N. J., has several back issues of FA and AS that he wishes to trade. Also wishes correspondents, preferably female, age 14 to 17. Would especially like to hear from Chester Hoey, New York.

PRINTED IN U. S. A.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

1/3 MFRS. ORIG. PRICE

GENUINE *Late Model No. 8*

L.C.SMITH

was $102.50

NOW $34.85 CASH

While 297 Last!

or Buy on EASIEST TERMS

Buy direct from us at about 1/3 mfrs. orig. price and save over $60.00! Beautifully rebuilt and unconditional 2 yr. guarantee. No down payment necessary—10 day Trial.

nly **70¢** *a week*

NO MONEY DOWN

10 DAYS TRIAL

Easy Terms—10c a day

No obligation. Send no money. See before you buy on wide-open 10 day Trial. Pay on easiest terms—only 10c a day. You get this genuine late office model L. C. Smith beautifully rebuilt with all standard improvements—basket shift, standard 84 character, 4-row keyboard, shift lock key, back spacer, 2 color ribbon, ribbon reverse, stencil cutting device, tabulator, etc. Ball bearing throughout—quiet operation. THOUSANDS PAID $102.50—IT'S YOURS FOR ONLY $34.85 (CASH PRICE). No risk, money back guarantee!

2 YEAR GUARANTEE

Our 2 year ironclad guarantee is your assurance of satisfaction and long service. *You must be satisfied that this is the biggest, best typewriter bargain ever offered!* Our 30 years of Fair Dealing Backs Up This Guarantee.

IDEAL FOR HOME OR OFFICE

This late L. C. Smith with basket shift is the machine used by schools, large corporations and business houses the country over. The perfect, all-purpose typewriter for correspondence, office work, billing, manifold work, etc. Has all modern improvements you need, stands hard service—IT'S YOURS AT ONLY $3.00 A MONTH.

WIDE CARRIAGE MODELS

Wide carriage L. C. Smiths for government reports, large office forms, billing, etc. The 14 inch carriage takes paper 15" wide, has 12" writing line—only $3.00 extra with order. The 18 inch carriage takes paper 18" wide, has 16" writing line—only $5.00 extra with order. (See coupon.)

INTERNATIONAL TYPEWRITER EXCHANGE
231 West Monroe Street Dept. 1292 Chicago, Ill.

EXTRA VALUE

ROLL-A-WAY SECRETARIAL

TYPEWRITER STAND

For those who have no typewriter stand or handy place to use a machine I make this special offer. This attractive stand that ordinarily sells for $4.85 can be yours with L. C. Smith for only $3.00 extra—payable 25c a month. Quality built. Just note all its convenient features. (See Coupon.)

Mounted on casters, can be moved by touch of finger.

Big working surface, all metal, compact, strong, attractive Two wings, correct working height.

FREE

COMPLETE TOUCH TYPING COURSE

We give FREE with your L. C. Smith a complete 9 lesson Home Study course of Famous Van Sant Touch Typing system. You can now learn typing quickly and easily.

OFFER FOR LIMITED TIME—SEND COUPON TODAY

Accept this wide open offer now. Send no money. Use L. C. Smith for 10 days trial in your home. Return it if you don't think it the greatest value you have ever seen. If you buy, pay on easiest terms—only $3.00 a month. 2 yr. ironclad guarantee.

Avoid disappointment — mail coupon today.

MAIL this COUPON

INTERNATIONAL TYPEWRITER EXCHANGE, Dept. 1292, 231 W. Monroe St., Chicago, Ill.

Send me L. C. Smith (F. O. B. Chicago) for 10 days' trial. If I keep it I will pay $3.00 per month until easy term price ($38.85) is paid. If I am not satisfied, I can return it express collect.

☐ 10" carriage ☐ 14" carriage ($3.00 extra) ☐ 18" carriage ($5.00 extra)

☐ Check for typewriter stand ($3.00 extra—payable 25c a month). Stand sent on receipt of first payment on L. C. Smith.

Name ..... Age.....

Typewritten signatures not acceptable.

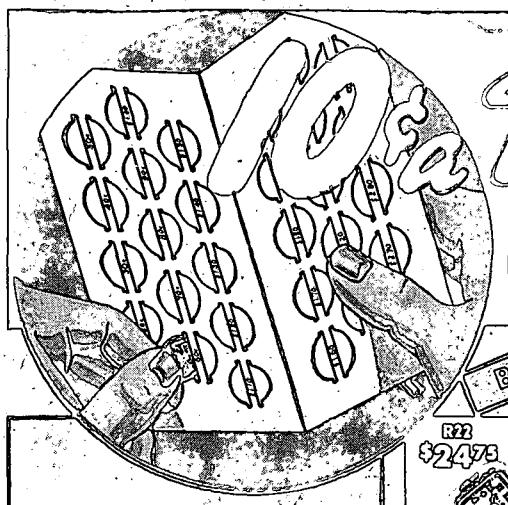
Address .....

City ..... State.....

CAUTION: FOR QUICK SHIPMENT GIVE OCCUPATION AND REFERENCE.

OVER 200,000 SATISFIED CUSTOMERS ALL OVER THE WORLD

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



10¢ a Day buys a Watch on Our SAVINGS BOOK PLAN

BULOVA · ELGIN · GRUEN · KENT · BENRUS

Yes—only 10c a day on my SAVINGS BOOK PLAN will buy your choice of these nationally known watches. It's simple—here's how you go about it...

WHAT YOU DO:

Send coupon below with a dollar bill and a brief note telling me who you are, your occupation, and a few other facts about yourself. Indicate the watch you want on coupon, giving number and price.

WHAT I'LL DO:

I'll open an account for you on my SAVINGS BOOK PLAN, send the watch you want for approval and

10-DAY TRIAL

If satisfied, you pay 10 monthly payments. If you are not satisfied after wearing the watch for ten days, send it back and I'll return your dollar on our

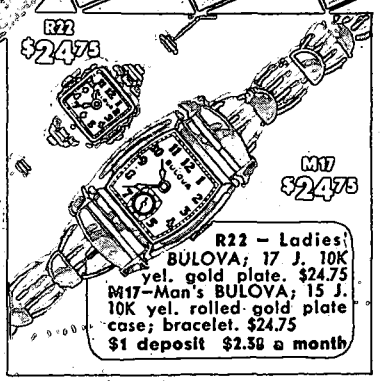
MONEY-BACK GUARANTEE

A Savings Book will be sent to you to help you save your dime each day. YOU PAY MONTHLY by money order or check. Try this easy, convenient method that has helped thousands to own fine watches without burden on the pocket book or savings.

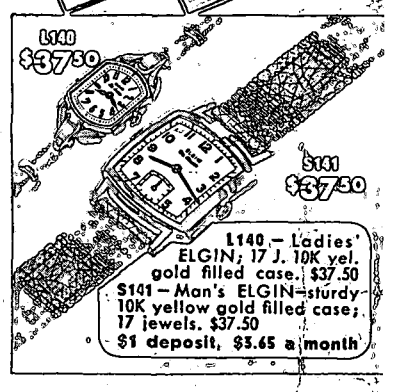
Jim Feeney

FREE TO ADULTS

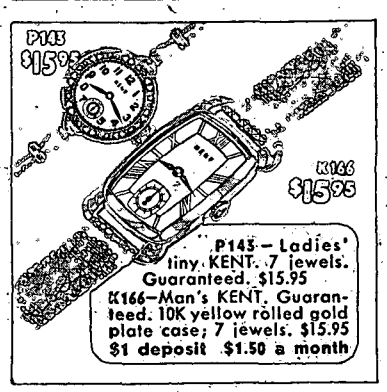
A postcard brings my complete 48-page catalogue and full details on my SAVINGS BOOK PLAN. No obligation.



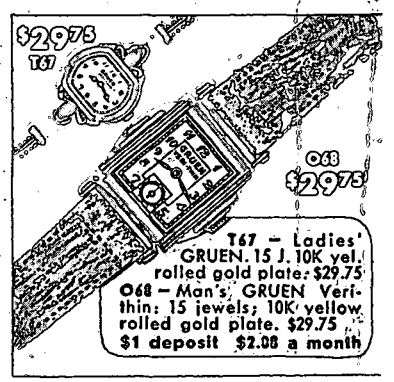
R22 – Ladies' BULOVA; 17 J. 10K yel. gold plate. $24.75
M17–Man's BULOVA; 15 J. 10K yel. rolled gold plate case; bracelet. $24.75
$1 deposit $2.38 a month



L140 – Ladies' ELGIN; 17 J. 10K yel. gold filled case. $37.50
S141 – Man's ELGIN–sturdy 10K yellow gold filled case; 17 jewels. $37.50
$1 deposit, $3.65 a month



P143 – Ladies' tiny KENT. 7 jewels. Guaranteed. $15.95
K166–Man's KENT. Guaranteed. 10K yellow rolled gold plate case; 7 jewels. $15.95
$1 deposit $1.50 a month



T67 – Ladies' GRUEN. 15 J. 10K yel. rolled gold plate. $29.75
O68 – Man's GRUEN Verithin: 15 jewels; 10K yellow rolled gold plate. $29.75
$1 deposit $2.08 a month

K273 – Service Watch – new radium dial, easy-to-see. 7 Jewels, sturdy 10K yellow rolled gold plate case. Made especially for Army and Navy men.
$1 deposit $1.90 a month

T567 – BENRUS for Ladies. 7 jewels, 10K gold plate; bracelet. $19.75
O564–Man's BENRUS: 17 jewels; 10K yellow rolled gold plate; leather strap. $19.75
$1 deposit $1.88 a month

JIM FEENEY
L. W. Sweet—Dept. 761-M 1670 Broadway
New York, N. Y.

Enclosed find $1 deposit. Send me Watch No. _____ Price $_____. I agree to wear the watch for 10 days. If not satisfied, I'll return it and you will refund my dollar. If I keep it, I'll pay balance in 10 equal monthly payments.

NAME_____

ADDRESS_____

CITY_____ STATE_____

L. W. Sweet

MAIL ORDER DIVISION OF FINLAY STRAUS, Inc.
Dept. 761-M 1670 BROADWAY, NEW YORK

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED